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(Same As the Old)

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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The China Syndrome

When it comes to China policy, American presidents over the past generation have adhered to a relatively simple pattern: Talk tough before taking office, then, once in the White House, backpedal. As James Mann documents in this issue ("Senior Moments," page 13), the first President Bush was something of an idealist on China early in his career, decrying Henry Kissinger's strategy of cozying up to Mao Zedong during the 1970s and worrying that U.S. policy toward Beijing did not give high enough priority to the promotion of freedom. By the time he became president, however, Bush had adopted a very different approach; and, when tanks rolled into Tiananmen Square, the erstwhile defender of Chinese human rights could muster only the weakest of responses. Indeed, just over six months later, Bush would dispatch Brent Scowcroft to Beijing, where the ur-realist saw fit to toast China's murderous leaders as "friends."

Edel Rodriguez

And friends they would remain. During the 1992 campaign, Bill Clinton sounded a lot like the young Bush Senior on China, denouncing our "very tepid response" to the Tiananmen massacre and saying, "I think it is a mistake for us to do what this administration did when all those kids went out there carrying the Statue of Liberty in Tiananmen Square." He promised to be "firm" with China's rulers and demand that they "observe human rights in the future." And then? Clinton got elected and promptly changed his mind, admitting that his initial approach to China had been a mistake, largely ignoring Beijing's abuse of human rights, and rationalizing it all by predicting that, "when over 100 million people in China can get on the Net, it will be impossible to maintain a closed political and economic society." (How convenient for a president to argue that he needn't look out for American principles abroad because technology would do the job for him. History, of course, has made a mockery of this sentiment: Today, there are more than 220 million Chinese online, and the country is little closer to political freedom.)

Then, in 2000, along came George W. Bush, who also talked tough on China, albeit with more of a focus on grand strategy than human rights. Asked by Larry King in 2000, "What area of American international policy would you change immediately as president?" Bush responded, "Our relationship with China." He went on: "The current president has called the relationship with China a strategic partnership. I believe our relationship needs to be redefined as one of competitor." Once Bush took office, of course, this tough stance toward China melted. To be sure, September 11 altered America's strategic priorities in a way that no one could have foreseen. On the other hand, for a president who has staked his legacy on the worldwide promotion of freedom and democracy, Bush has been notably reticent to challenge China's leaders—on Tibet, Burma, Darfur, or their abuses at home. And, in two months, Bush will do China the honor of attending the Olympics, despite considerable evidence that Beijing's human rights record has actually worsened during the run-up to the Games.

Now we find ourselves in another campaign season and, wouldn't you know, once again awash in the usual tough talk (McCain: "When China builds new submarines, adds hundreds of new jet fighters, modernizes its arsenal of strategic ballistic missiles, and tests antisatellite weapons, the United States legitimately must question the intent of such provocative acts"), idealistic rhetoric (Obama: "China is not an enemy of ours. . . . But whether it's the situation in Tibet or their support of the government in Khartoum that is helping to perpetrate the genocide in Darfur, we can't be silent"), and nods to principle (both candidates have suggested they would consider boycotting the Olympic opening ceremonies). Chinese leaders, however, are almost certainly not alarmed. Over the years, they must have noticed how presidential aspirants who denounced America's accommodation of China became White House occupants who dealt gingerly with their "friends" in Beijing. They surely expect that, come January 2009, the usual pattern will hold.

We hope it doesn't. It is true that America has key interests in China—strategic, economic, environmental—that no president would dream of ignoring. And of course there are times when human rights should take a backseat to these matters. For too long, however, the mere existence of other priorities has given presidents an excuse to permanently relegate human rights to second-tier status in our relationship with Beijing. This practice has to end.

The next president might start by drawing a clear distinction between the men who hold power in China and the

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people over whom they rule. China scholar Perry Link has persuasively argued that Americans have long tended to confuse the statements of the Chinese government with the sentiments of Chinese citizens. As a result, Link says, our government plays "a much weaker hand than it could in supporting the Chinese people in their quest for [a] … fairer, more transparent, and more law-governed society."

There is, in fact, considerable evidence that many Chinese resent their government's ugly practices—its endemic corruption, its restrictions on religious freedom, its land confiscation policies, and so on. It may seem like a small step, but for the next president to speak forcefully and regularly about these issues would represent an important change in our relationship with the country. "The United States … could do much more good than it is now doing by using dignified, clear, and strong public statements," argues Link—and he is right. No, such a step will not bring down the government. Nor will it necessarily lead to dissidents flooding out of jails. But it would, at the very least, signal to the Chinese people that our ultimate solidarity lies not with their odious government but with them: the billion, long-suffering men and women of the world's largest dictatorship, our true "friends" in China.

Drilling Deeper

This past Wednesday, President Bush called for ending a federal ban on offshore oil drilling, two days after John McCain flip-flopped to take the same position. The idea may or may not have merit in the long run, but what it *won't* do is lower gas prices in the short term: The Department of Energy estimates that it would take more than 20 years for either production levels or prices to be affected by a repeal of the ban on offshore drilling. Because the amount of oil at stake is so tiny (about 19 billion barrels, equivalent to around seven months of global consumption), it won't do much at all to ease jitters or help deflate a bubble in oil markets.

Look on the bright side, though: At least it wasn't the worst idea Bush proposed in his energy speech. He also urged Congress to allow oil shale leasing on federal lands in the Green River basin in Utah, Colorado, and Wyoming. Unlike the offshore-drilling idea, oil shale development, at least in theory, promises a *lot* of oil: The Green River basin alone may hold 800 billion recoverable barrels.

Unfortunately, the idea has a number of problems. For one thing, nobody really knows how to do it: Bob Loucks, a former oil shale production manager, told *Environmental Science and Technology* that, "[d]espite all the attempts to develop a shale-oil industry in the U.S. over the past 100 years, the fact remains that no proven method exists for efficiently removing the oil from the rock." And, whereas oil companies say they can drill for conventional oil in sensitive areas without damaging the environment, hardly anyone even bothers making that claim when it comes to oil shale development, which by its very nature requires disturbing huge tracts of land. It also usually results in toxic minerals leaching into groundwater—which drains into the Green River and could contaminate the rest of the Colorado basin. Suffice it to say that there are lots of people in Las Vegas, Phoenix, Los Angeles, and San Diego who would not be pleased.

And then there are greenhouse gases: If you're a fan of regular fossil-fuel carbon emissions, you'll *love* oil shale. According to a study by U.C. Berkeley's Adam Brandt, oil shale produces between 27 and 52 percent more greenhouse gas emissions per unit of energy than conventional oil, in large part because of the enormous energy inputs required to heat the rock in order to yield oil. Indeed, it takes so much energy in other forms (in particular, electricity from coal) to recover oil from shale that the net energy benefit ends up being much smaller than it first appears. Congress is already doing plenty to promote inefficient, environmentally unsound sources of energy; the last thing it needs is another sham solution. ◆

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

The "Great Moments in Veep History" timeline in our last issue erroneously identified Charles Fairbanks as the vice president in 1902. In fact, Fairbanks did not take office until the beginning of Theodore Roosevelt's second term, in March 1905. We regret the error.

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Cover: ***Long Live Chairman Mao Series #29*** **(1989) by Zhang Hongtu, © the artist, the Saatchi Gallery, London, from** ***The Revolution Continues*** **(Rizzoli, New York, 2008). Acrylic and Quaker Oats box, 24.4 x 12.7 x 12.7 cm.**

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As a child, Srnka's interest in science and engineering was inspired by seeing the 1957 Sputnik launch. He began his career at NASA's Lunar Science Institute studying the interior of the moon and planets, before turning to his true passion — Earth.

Today, Srnka, 61, is one of the more than 14,000 scientists and engineers at ExxonMobil who are advancing breakthrough technologies such as R3M, which can unlock the resources we need to meet growing energy demand in an environmentally responsible way.

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Terror Firma

John McCain returns to Ground Zero.

JONATHAN CHAIT

Last week, the terrorism "issue" made its campaign debut. I use scare quotes not because terrorism is not a threat, but because it's unclear precisely what issue is at stake. John McCain's campaign has been determined to have a debate about terrorism, which polls have shown to be the only issue where he has any meaningful edge over Barack Obama. The problem is that on the only terrorism-related positions where Obama has staked out ground to the left of the Bush administration—torture, closing Guantánamo—McCain has, too.

But McCain saw his opportunity when Obama made the following comment:

> What we know is that, in previous terrorist attacks—for example, the first attack against the World Trade Center—we were able to arrest those responsible, put them on trial. They are currently in U.S. prisons, incapacitated. And the fact that the administration has not tried to do that has created a situation where not only have we never actually put many of these folks on trial, but we have destroyed our credibility when it comes to rule of law all around the world, and given a huge boost to terrorist recruitment in countries that say, "Look, this is how the United States treats Muslims."

You may wonder what exactly McCain objects to here. The answer is that Obama endorsed *prosecuting terrorists*. In the Republican mind, there is a vast metaphysical divide over the question of how you fight terrorists. Tough guys like George W. Bush and McCain understand the evil of terrorism at a gut level and want to fight it with the military, using big guns and bombs. Wimps like John Kerry and Obama have a daintier, more equivocal sensibility, and prefer to deploy nerdy prosecutors to "serve our enemies with legal papers," as Bush liked to say.

And so, when Obama let pass from his lips a reference to trying terrorists in court, McCain's campaign pounced. Foreign policy adviser Randy Scheunemann warned, "Obama holds up the prosecution of the terrorists who bombed the World Trade Center in 1993 as a model for his administration, when in fact this failed approach of treating terrorism simply as a matter of law enforcement rather than a clear and present danger to the United States contributed to the tragedy of September 11th." McCain's blog scoffed, "It's hardly surprising that a lawyer would think that the war on terror would be fought more effectively by lawyers than by the United States Marine Corps."

It doesn't matter that Obama never said, or even implied, that legal prosecution should be the sole method of preventing terrorism. The fact that he even *mentioned* prosecution apparently proves that he has what McCain's campaign called a "September 10th mindset."

Yet some logical flaws with this analysis present themselves. (And yes, I realize that the mere fact that I would intellectualize this issue, rather than understanding it in my gut, proves that I too have a September 10th mindset.) First, terrorists often operate in our country, or in friendly countries, which makes military action against them tricky. McCain (through his campaign blog) assailed Obama for favoring "prosecutors rather than predators." But, when the terrorists are holed up in New York City, as was the case with the 1993 bombers Obama referred to, simply arresting them strikes me as more efficient than leveling their apartment with a drone-fired missile.

Second, when terrorists can be found outside the reach of law enforcement, Obama has explicitly proposed to strike them militarily. Last summer, *The New York Times* reported that the Bush administration had actionable intelligence about high-level Al Qaeda operatives in Pakistan. It planned a snatch-and-grab operation but cancelled at the last minute. In a speech the following month, Obama called this "a terrible mistake," and promised, "If we have actionable intelligence about high-value terrorist targets and President Musharraf won't act, we will." McCain criticized Obama for this, too, saying he "once suggested bombing our ally, Pakistan."

Third, none other than Rudy Giuliani, Mr. 9/11 himself, once prosecuted terrorists. In 1994, Giuliani said that the conviction of World Trade Center bombers "demonstrates that New Yorkers won't meet violence with violence, but with a far greater weapon—the law." You might say, in Giuliani's defense, that he did this before September 11. After that, Everything Changed, and, if he caught terrorists again, he would use tactical nuclear weapons against them. The problem here is that he continued to tout his prosecution of terrorists during his comically unsuccessful presidential campaign. But maybe this just goes to show that the September 10th mindset is so seductive that it can strike even its most vigilant adversaries.

I would have thought the example of Giuliani would be inconvenient enough that the McCain campaign would hide him in the closet while they bashed Obama for favoring the prosecution of terrorists. Instead, McCain's campaign trotted Giuliani out for a press conference call and a round of talk show appearances, possibly because he seems to materialize out of thin air whenever the phrase "9/11" is uttered.

Giuliani's sudden appearance is somehow perfectly apt. His lasting legacy to the political culture may be taking a concept (9/11) that was freighted with the strongest emotional and patriotic overtones and doing to it what Clara Peller did to "Where's the Beef?" Giuliani relentlessly milked 9/11 because (as McCain himself pointed out not long ago!) he had no foreign policy experience and repeatedly demonstrated his ignorance of basic facts about his alleged area of competence. He's the perfect embodiment of the foreign policy style that has prevailed most of the last seven years.

The sad irony is that McCain actually had a perfectly credible line of foreign policy attack against Obama: that Iraq is improving and could be imperiled by a pullout. I'm not sure I agree with his argument, but it is looking steadily stronger. His descent into Giuliani-ism, however, suggests his campaign thinks winning on Iraq wouldn't be enough. It's as if, by invoking 9/11, he can summon the return of the mentality that prevailed in the years after the attack.

McCain spent the previous couple months mimicking every theme of the Hillary Clinton unsuccessful candidacy. Now, dropping in the polls, he's mimicking the themes Giuliani rode to a spectacular flameout. It may work. If not, he can always try to tap into the magic of the Jim Gilmore campaign. ◆

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External Flame

Why Caroline Kennedy needs Barack Obama.

If Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg is crazy for Barack Obama, the guy must really be something special, right?

This, clearly, is the line of thinking Team Obama hopes voters will follow as it thrusts the lone surviving child of John F. Kennedy to the fore of its presidential effort. First there was Kennedy Schlossberg's endorsement of the candidate during the primaries, followed by her appearance in a campaign ad and at multiple rallies for him. Then, upon securing the nomination, Obama promptly tapped Kennedy Schlossberg for his vice-presidential selection committee.

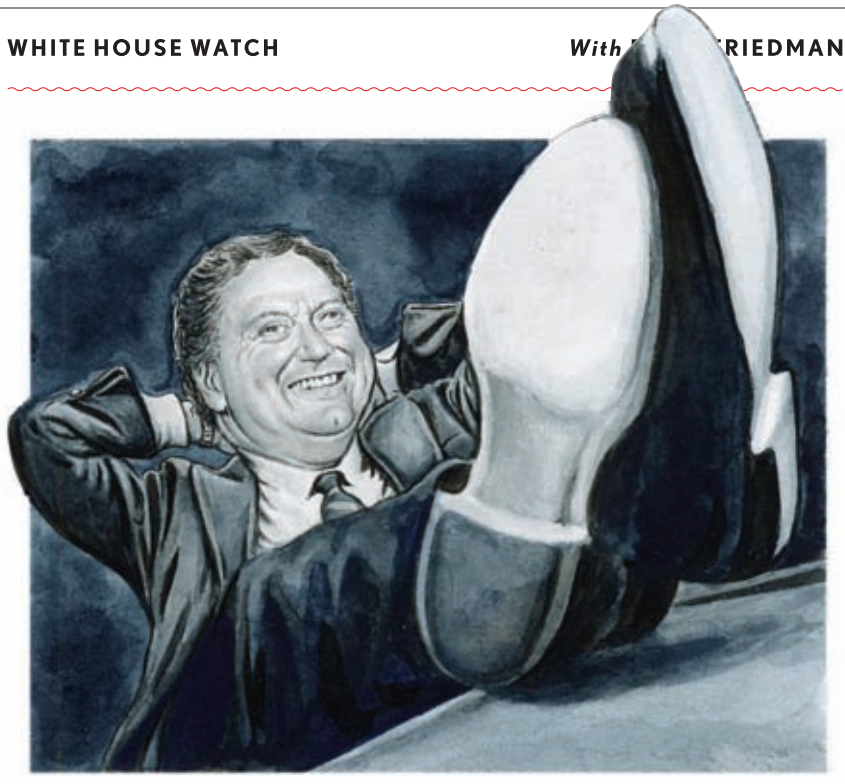
Critics may deride Kennedy Schlossberg as an unqualified and twitty political dilettante, but it doesn't take a strategy expert to grasp why Obama has carved out such a prominent role for her. She is a Kennedy. She is a woman. Better still, up to this point she has largely steered clear of the unseemly business of electoral politics. Instead, she has nurtured the family legacy by quietly tending the memories of others: first dad, then mom, and even brother John. In a family full of paparazzi magnets, self-promoters, and aspiring political stars, Kennedy Schlossberg has long glowed softly in the minds of many as the Great Custodian—an eternally gracious, dignified, selfless link to a purer, more buoyant political age.

But this alliance may be an even shrewder move for Kennedy Schlossberg than for Obama. It's been 45 years since the fall of Camelot, and the family brand has begun to fade. A growing portion of the electorate was born after the deaths of John and Bobby and has a tough time relating to the Kennedy fixation of its elders. Under such conditions, what's a committed custodian of the family legacy to do? Hitch her clan's wagon to the hottest political star in decades. With a little luck, even as that old Camelot magic rubs off on Obama, the candidate's energy and relevance will help sustain the Kennedy brand for a little longer. If that means Kennedy Schlossberg must surrender her cherished privacy to suffer through unflattering media cycles and self-conscious stump speeches (memo to the campaign: urge her not to try a fist pump again—ever), then so be it. For JFK's daughter, preserving the family legacy has always come first. And, as the last few months have shown, she's pretty darn good at it—or, at least, better than her reputation as a political naïf would suggest.

For Americans of a certain age, Caroline Kennedy will forever be the cherubic blonde tot riding her pony on the White House lawn—an image so heartwarming it spurred songwriter Neil Diamond to pen "Sweet Caroline." As an adult, much of her professional energy has been dedicated to restoring the spirit and ethos of that time. In 1989, she, her mother, and her brother founded the Profiles In Courage Award to honor public officials "whose actions best demonstrate the qualities of politically courageous leadership in the spirit of" JFK's 1957 Pulitzer-winning book by the same name. She serves as president of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum and on the advisory board of Harvard's Institute of Politics, established by the family as a living tribute to the former president.

It is not only her father's legacy that she labors to uphold. Upon her mother's death in 1994, Kennedy Schlossberg became more visible in New York's

WHITE HOUSE WATCH *With [illegible]RIEDMAN*



Tim Russert, RIP.

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philanthropic and cultural world. Most prominently, she took over Jackie's seat as honorary chair of American Ballet Theatre, presiding over the company's annual gala. (ABT's school was renamed after Jackie in 2004.) And, in the wake of her younger brother's tragic plane crash in 1999, Kennedy Schlossberg temporarily took on some of his duties. Among her first public appearances after John's death was to present the JFK "hero awards" bestowed by the Robin Hood Foundation, one of her brother's pet charities. At the time, she spoke to people of her desire to support the causes that John had cared about.

As for politics, Kennedy Schlossberg's involvement has typically been confined to the service of the family. During her undergraduate years at Harvard, she spent summers interning in "Uncle Teddy"'s Senate office to gain an appreciation of the family's history. In 1994, she stumped for both Ted's sixth Senate bid and cousin Patrick's House race in Rhode Island. She declined an invitation to chair the 1992 Democratic Convention but spoke briefly at the 2000 gathering, officially introducing her uncle.

None of this is to suggest that Kennedy Schlossberg has no identity beyond that of Kennedy custodian. An attorney by training, she has done extensive work with the New York City public schools and also lends her star power to the occasional crusade: In 1998, she came out against an anti–affirmative action initiative in Washington State and spoke at the United Nations urging the U.S. Senate to ratify an international treaty on children's rights.

But even some of her independent endeavors have an elegiac feel. Often identified as an author and editor, Kennedy Schlossberg has co-written two books on civil liberties. Of the books she is best-known for editing, however, most involve her famous family, including a collection of her mother's favorite poems, an update on her father's book (*Profiles in Courage for Our Time*), a collection of Christmas stories including personal writings from her family, and a collection of her favorite children's poems, knit together with anecdotes from her childhood. To some degree, she is less an editor than an anthologist of family memories.

Even now, as she makes the rare foray onto the trail on behalf of a non-relative, Kennedy Schlossberg invariably frames her support in terms of restoration rather than revolution—of how Obama is renewing our faith in the American Dream like no politician since JFK. Her official endorsement in the January 27 *New York Times*—headlined A PRESIDENT LIKE MY FATHER—began: "Over the years, I've been deeply moved by the people who've told me they wished they could feel inspired and hopeful about America the way people did when my father was president. This sense is even more profound today. That is why I am supporting a presidential candidate in the Democratic primaries, Barack Obama." The TV spot she cut for the campaign, "Caroline," opens with grainy news footage of President Kennedy and of the moon walk.

This back-to-Camelot message carries obvious advantages for Obama, but also potential downsides. Some detractors have, for instance, pointed out that glomming on to the Kennedy mystique is a peculiar strategy for a man whose entire candidacy is predicated on shaking up the status quo and rewriting the rules of the game.

There are, however, fewer apparent negatives for the Kennedys, and therein lies the genius of what Caroline has done. In a lifetime of looking out for the Kennedy name, attaching herself to Obama could turn out to be her most important endeavor yet—allowing her to bolster the family brand in the minds of young voters and thus secure it a role in the party's future. Because, if Barack Obama is crazy for the Kennedys, they must really be something special, right?

Michelle Cottle

"Sweet Caroline" at the dawn of Camelot in 1960.

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Narrow Minded

John Roberts does Obama a favor.

In 2006, at the end of his first term on the Supreme Court, John Roberts told me and other journalists that his goal as chief justice would be to promote unanimity and collegiality by encouraging his fellow justices to converge around narrow decisions with few dissents. During his first term, Roberts succeeded impressively: More than half of the Court's opinions were unanimous, and only 13 percent were decided by a 5–4 vote.

The polarized Supreme Court term that ended last June, however, looked very different. Only 38 percent of the Court's decisions were unanimous, and 33 percent were decided 5–4, the highest percentage in recent years. Moreover, in cases striking down affirmative action and campaign finance reform, Roberts and his dissenting colleagues attacked each other in unusually personal terms. Noting this, some liberal bloggers and journalists argued that Roberts's call for unanimity had been a charade. Emily Bazelon of *Slate* wrote that Roberts didn't actually care about "unity and restraint" and that he would become only more extreme over time.

Bazelon's judgment was premature. Although this Supreme Court term isn't over,

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Bulldozer sales in America have been booming. Road builders need them to level rolling hills into concrete interchanges and bypasses. Developers need them to turn farmland into housing developments and shopping malls. You can find big earthmoving equipment throughout America, turning our most picturesque land into suburban sprawl, while adding to some of the worst traffic problems in the world. But traffic is just one of the problems facing America as a result of population growth wildly out of control. Schools and emergency rooms are bursting at the seams, and public infrastructure is under great stress. Property taxes are on the rise. Yet the bulldozers keep on coming, ripping up some of the most beautiful farms and forests in the world and turning them into concrete and asphalt suburbs. But with U.S. census projections indicating our population will explode from 300 million today to 400 million in thirty years and 600 million before 2100*, bulldozer sales should keep on booming. Unless we take action today. The Pew Hispanic Research Center projects 82% of the country's massive population increase, between 2005 and 2050, will result from immigration. And with every new U.S. resident, whether from births or immigration, comes further degradation of America's natural treasures. There's not much we can do to reclaim the hundreds of millions of acres already destroyed. But we can do something about what's left. Visit our websites to find out how you can help.

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it's already shaping up to be something of a bipartisan lovefest. "Where have all the 5–4 decisions gone?" asks Linda Greenhouse of *The New York Times*. As of this writing, nearly 40 percent of this term's decisions were unanimous, and only 14 percent were decided by 5–4 splits. Even more tellingly, some of the term's more controversial decisions—including those involving lethal injections, voter identification laws, federal efforts to curb child pornography, and Iraqi detentions—were unanimous or decided by lopsided, bipartisan majorities. True, there have been a handful of high-profile 5–4 decisions along familiar ideological lines, such as the case extending the writ of habeas corpus to inmates at Guantánamo Bay—and there may well be more in the final weeks of the term—but they have been the exception, not the rule.

It's still too early to judge Roberts's tenure, but it seems increasingly clear that liberals dodged a bullet when President Bush nominated him to be chief justice. Instead of siding with conservative extremists like Clarence Thomas, who are eager to press the limits of the so-called Constitution in Exile, resurrecting limits on federal power whenever possible, Roberts prefers narrow opinions that can attract support from the center. Liberals ought to applaud this instinct because, even if Barack Obama gets to appoint the next justice or two, it's the only thing standing between them and a Court eager to roll back progressive reforms.

Why was Roberts successful in uniting the Court this year? Part of the reason, as Orin Kerr of George Washington University recently observed, is that he has done exactly what he said he would do in 2006: namely, convince moderate liberals and conservatives that unanimity is in their interest. In particular, Roberts has been more willing than his predecessor to assign plurality (rather than majority) opinions. In these cases, Roberts begins with the three center-right conservatives (himself, Anthony Kennedy, and Samuel Alito) and tries to attract liberal justices to a narrowly reasoned decision, while letting the hard-line conservatives (Thomas and Antonin Scalia) write separate, more extreme concurrences. In cases with no majority opinion, the narrowest opinion for the winning side has to be followed as if it were the majority opinion. Roberts has followed this strategy—finding a "sweet spot," as Kerr puts it, by "aiming toward the middle"—in the recent 7–2 and 6–3 cases upholding lethal injections and voter ID requirements. In both cases, the Court issued a moderately conservative controlling opinion joined by one or two liberal justices, followed by more extreme concurrences by Scalia and Thomas.

Roberts has also promoted unanimity by encouraging the Court to hear more business cases, in which the justices tend not to divide along ideological lines. Roberts told me that unanimity in less high-profile cases could promote "a culture and an ethos that says, 'It's good when we're all together,' " and that's exactly what the business cases—which represent about 45 percent of the court's docket this year—have achieved.

Out of 14 cases in which the U.S. Chamber of Commerce filed briefs this year, 86 percent have already been decided by margins of 7–2 or better and over one-third have been unanimous. During a TNR town-hall interview in March, Justice Stephen Breyer explained that cases involving the interpretation of federal statutes were often less divisive than constitutional cases because they turn on more technical questions about which the justices don't have strong pre-existing views. He also said that when a decision was nearly unanimous, he was inclined to think: "Maybe that was the right answer!"

In cases where the justices do have strong constitutional views, such as the decision last week involving habeas corpus at Guantánamo, the familiar 5–4 ideological divisions persist. But, even in the Guantánamo case, Roberts dissented from the majority opinion in far more measured terms than he had used to criticize Breyer's dissent in the affirmative action case last year. Avoiding Scalia's hysterical claim that this decision "will almost certainly cause more Americans to be killed"—an assertion unsupported by anything in the government's brief—Roberts respectfully argued that the liberal justices themselves had previously suggested that Congress, rather than the courts, should decide detention policy. Similarly, Justice John Paul Stevens's willingness to side with the moderate conservatives in the voter ID, lethal injection, and child pornography cases suggests that he, too, has concluded that constructive engagement is better than 5–4 polarization when a narrowly reasoned opinion may leave the door open for liberal victories down the road.

In their eagerness to dismiss Roberts as a hypocrite, liberal critics have suggested that it doesn't matter whether conservative opinions are based on narrow or broad reasoning; all that matters is the bottom line. But this judgment, too, is shortsighted. Even if Obama wins the White House and has the opportunity to replace one or two retiring liberal justices, the Court's ideological makeup is likely to stay the same for the foreseeable future: four liberals and four conservatives, with Kennedy in the middle. If Roberts succeeds in promoting narrow, bipartisan opinions, the Court is unlikely to resurrect the Constitution in Exile and declare war on a progressive Congress for the first time since the New Deal era. By contrast, if Roberts fails and the Court gets in the habit of handing down sweeping conservative opinions by polarized 5–4 majorities, many of the health care and environmental reforms that progressives hope for from a Democratic president and Congress might be struck down by the Court.

As Larry Kramer, the dean of Stanford Law School, puts it, "Once solidly

David Cowles

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in power, Democrats are more likely to push the envelope in areas like the environment and health," rather than civil liberties, and a conservative court could push back by holding that Congress lacks the power to regulate matters previously left to the private sector. For example, according to Damon Silvers, associate general counsel for the AFL-CIO: "Legislation requiring employers to purchase health insurance for their employees could be challenged by arguments asserting the Constitution includes an unwritten guarantee of freedom of contract that would allow private parties to enter into employment contracts without health insurance." Going forward, Silvers told me, "[t]ax policies and regulations seeking to limit the use of carbon-based fuels could be challenged as a taking of someone's mineral rights." Although Thomas might be sympathetic to these arguments, he and Scalia would remain on the Court's conservative fringe in an Obama administration—but only if Roberts continues to promote narrow opinions that appeal to the center.

The presidential election, of course, will determine the future of the Roberts Court. If McCain wins, there will be a lopsided conservative majority, and Roberts will no longer need to win over the one or two liberal justices on the margins. But, if Obama wins, Roberts's success in promoting his vision of unity and minimalism will determine whether the Court blocks a Democratic Congress and White House or whether it lets them pass the laws that the American people expect.

Jeffrey Rosen

No Country for Young Men

China's testosterone problem.

Over the last decade, they cropped up in cities throughout China, tucked into raucous markets or along forgotten side streets, their interiors smelling of musty canvas and crammed with bounty for aspiring young soldiers: illicit weapons shops with names like ARMY GOODS STORE and GUNCOOL. For a few thousand yuan—a few hundred dollars—assault rifle–like air guns await in dirty back rooms, along with fatigues, bulletproof vests, kneepads, long underwear, camouflage T-shirts, rucksacks, bandoliers, helmets, helmet sleeves, walkie-talkies, and two-liter CamelBaks. Once outfitted, China's militiamen organize into clubs—Guangzhou Fight Men, Shanghai Band of Brothers, Tianjin Seals—and storm remote lots or abandoned warehouses, shooting at each other with pellets, to stage what they call "war games." The term belies the seriousness participants assign the activity: The more established clubs have dedicated battlegrounds whose surrounding trees are nailed with DANGER signs.

In gun-happy America, this hobby might not rise above the level of eccentricity; but, in China, where most weapons are illegal, it requires a special degree of passion. Beijing periodically cracks down, and clubs sometimes disappear overnight. In a round-up last year, Beijing cops seized 3,400 guns and knives used in war games. Still, the government can't seem to quash the urge among Chinese twentysomethings to unleash a few rounds. The headline on a recent *Shanghai Weekly* article explains the games' appeal in unusually apt Chinglish: URBAN BATTLE: A VERY MAN ACTIVITY.

The macho violence spurting forth through outlets like war games is a growing trend in Chinese society—and China's one-child policy, in effect since 1979, is partly responsible. The country's three decades of iron-fisted population planning coincided with a binge in sex-selective abortions (Chinese traditionally favor sons, who carry on the family line) and a rise, even as the country developed, in female infant mortality. After almost 30 years of the policy, China now has the largest gender imbalance in the world, with 37 million more men than women and almost 20 percent more newborn boys than girls nationwide.

By the time these newborns reach puberty, war games may seem like a quaint relic. In the 2020s, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences researcher Zheng Zhenzhen, estimates in a *People's Daily* interview that 10 percent of Chinese men will be unable to find wives, which could have a huge impact on Chinese society. Historian David Courtwright suggests in *Violent Land* that sexually segregated societies in the United States—frontier towns flush with unmarried men, immigrant ghettos in early twentieth-century cities, mining camps—are behind our propensity toward violence. The immigrants and westward migrants who shaped early America, Courtwright says, were largely young single men, who are—today as well as then—disproportionately responsible for drug abuse, looting, vandalism, and violent crime. A long-term study of Vietnam veterans in 1998 may explain exactly why: The subjects' testosterone levels, which are linked to aggression and violence, dropped when they married and increased when they divorced. Eternally single men, by extension, maintain high levels of testosterone—a recipe for violent civil unrest.

ANTHONY RUSSO

The one-child policy was instituted in an attempt to hamper the wild growth of the Chinese population. But, in the process of plugging one hole, the government may have left another open. The coming boom in restless young men promises to overhaul Chinese society in some potentially scary ways.

Lianyungang, a booming port city in a Jiangsu province economic belt, is ground zero for some of these changes. According to the China Family Planning Association, it's the city in China with the most extreme gender ratio for children under four—163 boys for every 100 girls. One sunny Saturday morning at verdant Cangwu Park, I count six boys and three girls bouncing on the inflatable castle. Near the ice-cream stand are a dozen sticky-faced kids, seven boys and five girls, feeding pigeons. The children running after kites adorned with Olympics mascots and China's Shenzhou VII spaceship: three and two. The drivers of the cheerful little tanks circling an electric track: three and one.

These numbers work fine on the playground, but, for China's many matchmaking services, they may prove troublesome. At the Good Luck Marriage Introduction Agency, in a town a few hours' drive west from Liangyungang, two whiteboards mounted on the wall advertise the age, height, and income of available singles. On the day I visit, founder Tao Hui, a fortysomething woman with a bouffant, is watching soap operas in her sweatpants. She hasn't felt the shortage yet, she says. On the whiteboards, a few dozen nameless men line up nicely to a few dozen nameless women. For now, many in the early wave of surplus men are marrying younger women.

"We'll see real problems in eight or ten years," Tao predicts. Her 17-year-old son, she assures me, has good prospects. But she already turns away a lot of single males from outlying villages with no money or education. "If they're ugly

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and can't find work, there's nothing I can do. No one wants them."

Preliminary returns from the first generation of population-controlled kids suggest how all those unwanted men might fill up their time. Over the past decade, as the boys hit adolescence, the country's youth crime rate more than doubled. In December, Chinese Society of Juvenile Delinquency Research Deputy Secretary General Liu Guiming told a Beijing seminar that today's teens were committing crimes "without specific motives, often without forethought."

The Chinese government—which, policy-making blunders aside, hardly wants a population of hopeless, volatile men under its rule—has been vainly trying to undo the damage. At a symposium on the policy last August, family-planning commission head Zhang Weiqing said the gender ratio harbors a "hidden threat to social stability." In February, officials publicly debated the timeline for phasing out stringent population planning targets, citing the gender ratio along with a rapidly aging population. "In the past, everyone thought we didn't have a problem," says Gu Baochang, a demographer at Renmin University in Beijing. "Now they're starting to pay attention."

In the meantime, the government is adopting a softer tone in its propaganda. The red characters painted on village walls throughout the countryside have evolved from the 1980s slogan YOU BEAT IT OUT! YOU CAN MAKE IT FALL OUT! YOU CAN ABORT IT! BUT YOU CANNOT GIVE BIRTH TO IT! Now they read: IMPLEMENT FAMILY PLANNING FOR THE GOOD OF ALL CITIZENS. And, recently, the government added BOYS AND GIRLS ARE BOTH TREASURES. In 2003, it unveiled the Care For Girls program, which gives stipends to parents of girls in some provinces.

But, as Chinese couples make more money, fertility is naturally declining—meaning that today's bachelors will form an even larger proportion of China's future population than officials expect. Wang Feng, a sociologist at the University of California-Irvine who's part of a group of scholars advocating phasing out the one-child policy, says the outlook is grim: "Each successive birth cohort is going to be smaller. When younger cohorts get smaller, you have fewer females. It's a double whammy."

China's angry young men, clockwise from top: at Tiananmen Square for National Day; at an underground music festival; illegal weapons confiscated in Nanjing; a model with a toy pistol at Chinese Fashion Week.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: MIKE FIALA/AP; STR/AP; EYE PRESS/AP; GREG BAKER/AP

Online, many Chinese are worried—about the safety of their daughters, the marriage prospects of their sons. Others—presumably the boys themselves—meet the problem with ominous boasts. As one predicted last year on the portal Tianya: "Our national ability to pick up chicks will reach heights unparalleled in human history."

And still others are coming up with more practical outlets to exploit China's new cadre of unstable young bachelors. Two years ago in Nanjing, Jiangsu's capital, businessman Wu Gang opened the Rising Sun Anger Release Bar in a cheap hotel near the bank of the Yangtze River. The bar featured staples of Chinese entertainment like big-screen karaoke and plates of sunflower seeds but also a central catwalk where, for 100 yuan ($15) per minute, customers paid to assault the waiters, single young migrants from poorer cities to the north. If a customer preferred, his victim would dress in drag. Men "are under too much pressure," Wu explained to me one day, as the waiters high-kicked Pepsi bottles in the storeroom. "They need a way to release it."

MARA HVISTENDAHL

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Senior Moments

The secret China history of George H. W. Bush.

While visiting his family in Asia after he graduated from Harvard Business School more than three decades ago, George W. Bush discovered the joys of Chinese dentistry. "George got his tooth fixed the day he left for 60 cents," recorded his father, George H.W. Bush, then America's top diplomat in Beijing. "He is now a great admirer of the Chinese medicine, and he is struggling, as a lot of us are, as to whether this universal health care—how it should work, etc. etc."

We learn of this Bush family struggle—which has, of course, since been resolved—and others from the newly published journal of George H.W. Bush, eventually the forty-first president of the United States. In 1974–1975, he served as head of the U.S. Liaison Office in Beijing, effectively the American ambassador to China in the years before there were diplomatic relations. While there, Bush dictated his thoughts into a tape recorder at the end of each day. They were later transcribed and have now been published for the first time in a little-noticed book, *The China Diary of George H.W. Bush*, edited by Jeffrey E. Engel.

For anyone who relishes historical irony, this book is a collector's item. These days, the senior Bush is regarded as a realist's realist, someone who is skeptical of overemphasizing ideals and principles in U.S. foreign policy. He was also, over the course of his career, one of the Chinese regime's closest friends in the U.S. political hierarchy. He is now remembered for his efforts to maintain ties with Beijing after the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. When, in his 1992 presidential campaign, Bill Clinton promised "an America that will not coddle tyrants from Baghdad to Beijing," he was taking a shot at George H.W. Bush.

So it's bracing to find that back in 1974–1975, while the same George H.W. Bush was stationed in Beijing, he complained that the United States was too soft in dealing with China. He inveighed against China's lack of political freedom. He disliked Henry Kissinger's embrace of Beijing. He made nasty cracks about "China specialists" and "experts" in the United States. He hated America's "euphoria" about all things Chinese. "I firmly believe that when we stand up for our principles, the Chinese understand," noted Bush. "So many China lovers in the United States want to do it exactly their way."

Before he was stationed in China, the elder Bush had been serving as head of the Republican National Committee under Richard Nixon, by any measure a lousy and thankless job. When Nixon resigned, Bush was desperate to get out of Washington for a while. He was sounded out about the embassies in London or Paris, but, to his credit, chose the far less luxurious post in Beijing. This wasn't sheer self-abnegation, though: Bush was eager to run for office again and wanted to be at the center of the diplomatic action. In this, he was to be disappointed.

David Cowles

When Bush landed in Beijing on October 21, 1974, its wind and dust reminded him of places he had encountered in the oil business. "It reminded me very much of West Texas and also of a trip to Kuwait," he observed. He soon tried to establish high-level contact with Chinese leaders. He paid a call on Deng Xiaoping, then a vice premier under Mao Zedong. Bush's initial impression of Deng, eventually the father of China's economic reforms: "He was a very short man." (For American one-liners about China, this ranks right up there with Richard Nixon's verdict on the Great Wall: "It really is a great wall.")

In fact, Bush's introductory session with Deng was misleading. Over the coming months, Bush discovered to his growing frustration that he couldn't see many people or do much. He had little access to top Chinese leaders because he faced two huge obstacles. One was the Chinese government, which kept rebuffing his requests for meetings with the line that it was "*bu fangbian*" (not convenient). The other problem was, in Bush's words, "Kissinger's strong arm on everything to do with China." The secretary of state wanted all high-level contact with China to be conducted either in Washington or on his own visits to Beijing. Bush was supposed to keep a low profile.

Bush consoled himself by trying to enjoy Beijing. He devoted himself to tennis at the International Club (one of his tennis buddies was the foreign correspondent John Burns, then of the Toronto *Globe and Mail*). Bush made repeated visits to the low-priced Hong Du tailor shop and took bike rides around the city with Barbara. Meanwhile, he held endless rounds of meetings with other ambassadors, most of whom tried to pump him about what Kissinger was up to with China and/or the Soviet Union. Bush wished he knew.

He learned the hard way that, for officials living overseas, exalted diplomacy must sometimes yield to more visceral concerns. "Saturday my amoeba aftereffects came back and right in the middle of my meeting with the Bulgarian ambassador. I was seized," Bush told his diary. "I rather diplomatically explained to him to wait, flipped on the VTR machine so he could see Nixon's coming to China three years ago almost to the day, and whipped into the downstairs men's room, returned weak."

Away from the action, he had time to reflect, both about China and about his own country's role in the world. In his diary, Bush frequently offered thoughts that, in today's idiom,

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might have caused him to be labeled a neoconservative. "Where is our ideology? Where is our principle? What indeed do we stand for?" he asked. "These things must be made clear, and the American people must understand that as soon as America doesn't stand for something in the world, there is going to be a tremendous erosion of freedom. It is true. It is very true. And yet it is awful hard to convince people of it at home."

He griped regularly about America's failure to apply to China the same standards that applied elsewhere. "The Russians get the kind of criticism that the Chinese avoid, and I am sure it drives the Russians right up the wall," Bush observed. He was particularly incensed when officials in Washington went along with a Chinese request to exclude Israeli, South African, and South Korean reporters from a new exhibit of Chinese archaeological finds at the National Gallery: "We must not permit China, particularly in the United States, to dictate terms to us in an area as sensitive as freedom of the press."

And then there was the question of human rights. "China is very vulnerable on human rights, just as the Soviet Union was," Bush thought. "Some day sure as can be Congress will turn its attention to these aspects of the Chinese policy. . . . [T]his euphoric analysis of this society as an open society, as a free society, a soft or gentle society, is simply wrong." All in all, Bush concluded, China was getting more out of its relationship with the United States than the United States was getting from China. "They need us, actually more than we need them in my judgment," he decided. "This is the consensus of the international community incidentally."

Bush's sojourn lasted little more than a year. By the spring of 1975, frustrated by the slow pace of his life in Beijing, he was thinking ahead to his next job. Should he run for governor of Texas or try to do something new in Washington? He kept a watchful eye on potential Republican rivals, such as Elliot Richardson (who had taken the London ambassadorial job) and White House Chief of Staff Donald Rumsfeld. Finally, in an administration shake-up beginning in October 1975, President Ford appointed Bush CIA director. "One tends to become more conservative after he has lived here a while," Bush concluded in his diary not long before he left.

Then Bush returned home. The diary stopped. Bush moved on, and, within the confines of the one-party state, so did China. After he became Ronald Reagan's vice president, and during a visit to Beijing in the early weeks of his own presidency, Bush found that China's top leaders would see him and talk to him. And so, in June 1989, after the violent crackdown in Tiananmen Square, Bush tried to telephone Deng Xiaoping, whom he had first gotten to know in Beijing 15 years earlier. Deng wouldn't take the call.

James Mann

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Cultural Devolution

Solving China's environmental catastrophe.

Cross over San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge, head north for half an hour, and you'll reach Mount Tamalpais State Park, home to redwood groves and, a little ways up, panoramic views of the bay. As it turns out, though, the park is also home to large amounts of pollution from Asia—dust, sulfur, trace metals—blowing in from across the Pacific. "We call it the persistent Asian plume," says Steven Cliff, an atmospheric scientist currently working with the California Air Resources Board. On some days, one-third of the state's background air pollution can be traced to Asia, and researchers are now looking into whether the plume could be disrupting cloud formation and rainfall in water-starved California.

It's a reminder that China's pollution problems aren't just taking a devastating toll on China—they're also affecting the rest of the world. Acid rain partly caused by Chinese sulfur emissions pours down on Japan and South Korea. Eighty percent of the East China Sea, one of the world's largest fisheries, has become toxic, due to sewage dumps from the mainland. And China, which is building coal plants at a shocking rate of two per week, is now the world's largest source of greenhouse gases, emitting 14 percent more carbon dioxide than the United States in 2007.

And, so, the international community is worried. At U.N. conferences, officials keep pushing the country to take stronger action on climate change. Europe and Japan have helped fund clean-energy projects in China, largely through the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism. In the United States, it's become common to hear politicians say that Beijing needs to be strong-armed into action. "If we do not act [on global warming]," Virginia Senator John Warner said recently, "China and India will hide behind America's skirts of inaction and take no steps of their own." Warner's cap-and-trade bill, which would limit U.S. carbon-dioxide emissions, even had a provision to slap carbon tariffs on Chinese imports if the country didn't take steps to tackle its emissions.

These ideas aren't without merit. But they also miss a key point: China's central government is well aware that its blackened rivers and sunless skies are a problem, not just because they're sparking riots and social unrest, but because out-of-control environmental degradation is imperiling the country's economic growth. Lately, Beijing has issued a slew of bold—at least on paper—environmental regulations. But the laws are doing little good because the central government can barely enforce them in its own provinces. This structural problem will remain the key to China's environmental dilemma, and, as countries attempt to push Beijing toward a cleaner future, they'll discover that the capital is the least of their troubles.

Even if the Chinese government does spruce up Beijing in time for the 2008 Olympics, the environmental situation in China remains horrifying. Toxic discharge from factories is turning rivers bright red or even black. Water shortages and rampant desertification are threatening to force tens of millions off their land. Sixteen of the 20 dirtiest cities in the world are in China. And, while few would begrudge China the right to follow in the West's footsteps and pollute in the service of getting richer, studies have found that contamination in the air and water now costs China up to 10 percent of GDP each year, destroying crops and forests and sending hundreds of thousands to the hospital with respiratory diseases or worse. A recent World Bank study estimated that pollution causes some 750,000 premature deaths in China each year. Even scarier for the Communist Party is the prospect of social turmoil: In 2006, China saw 60,000 pollution-related "incidents," a number of them violent.

For those reasons, the Chinese central government has started taking environmental regulation much more seriously. In 2006, the country's eleventh Five-Year Plan called for a 20 percent economy-wide increase in energy efficiency, while a

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2005 law requires 15 percent of the country's electricity to come from renewable sources by 2020; as a result, China now has one of the largest wind-power markets in the world. Its fuel-economy targets for vehicles—43 miles per gallon by 2009—are far stricter than those in the United States, and SUVs are subject to a heavy excise tax. Most recently, the government promoted its environmental agency to a ministry-level position. Although China could certainly be doing more, says Jennifer Turner, who directs the China Environment Forum at the Wilson Center, "when you look at the environmental laws, there's actually been a remarkable spirit of progressiveness."

The main obstacle is not Beijing's refusal to take green issues seriously. It's that the central government has essentially lost the ability to control its provinces and regulate its markets. Since the 1980s, after Deng Xiaoping declared that "To get rich is glorious," China has granted its provinces a large measure of autonomy to pursue that goal. State-owned enterprises have been sold off, markets deregulated, and local officials given wide leeway to stimulate their regional economies. Today, provincial officials rely on tax revenue (or even bribes) from local companies, and they sometimes own or have a personal stake in the businesses they oversee. But the same decentralized set-up that helped produce China's extraordinary economic growth has now made it difficult for Beijing to enforce rules issued from on high.

In the United States, state and federal agencies work together to enforce environmental laws. In China, however, provincial officials tend to focus on protecting their industries, and local regulatory agencies are on the payroll of the provinces, rather than the national government. Local officials determine matters like how emissions credits are doled out, often without clear rules from above. Many of the regulatory agencies, meanwhile, are bare-bones operations, especially inland. "You might have only three regulators for an area the size of Idaho," says Charles McElwee, an environmental lawyer based in Shanghai. "There could be factories going up that they're not even aware of." (All told, China's national environmental ministry has a few hundred employees, compared with more than 18,000 for the U.S. EPA.) As a result, green laws are rarely followed. One recent survey of 509 cities, for instance, found that 77 percent of sewage went untreated, as polluters simply ignored China's clean-water laws.

Beijing is aware of this local lawlessness, but has had little success handling it. "China used to send in SWAT teams from the central government," says Barbara Finamore, who directs the Natural Resources Defense Council's (NRDC) China program. "I've seen these campaigns going on for twenty years—they'll come in, shut down some factories, and, when they leave, they'll open up again." More recently, though, Beijing has begun tying performance evaluations for local officials to how well they meet their energy conservation goals. And, under a new green-finance effort, bank loans are being linked to environmental performance.

Still, even these attempts to rein in the provinces aren't enough. So, at the same time, Beijing is grudgingly permitting China's burgeoning green NGO movement to play a role. After all, part of what allows environmental rules to work in the United States is the fact that green groups can monitor polluters for violations of the law and either publicize the problem or file lawsuits. Since the early '90s, China has slowly begun giving green nonprofits, both domestic and international, a freer hand to expose polluting companies and put pressure on local regulatory agencies. After an illegal battery dump in a fishery in An Hui Province, Green An Hui, a small Chinese nonprofit with seed-money from U.S.-based Pacific Environment, drew press attention to the event, shaming local officials into disposing of the waste properly. But NGOs in China can only do so much: China's donation laws hamper their ability to raise money; and there are still unspoken limits on how freely they can speak out. "It's fine to criticize a hydropower dam on the basis of its ecological impact," says Wen Bo, a prominent green activist. "But you can't say particular officials were corrupted—then you would be in trouble."

Even so, the international community would be wise to follow the lead of these nonprofits. Right now, governments spend a lot of time imploring Beijing to take steps to curb its pollution. They might get further, however, by helping the central government implement the laws it's already passed. Finamore points out, for instance, that if China enforced all the building codes it has on the books, it could cut its energy use dramatically. NRDC is training Chinese building inspectors, who often don't understand the codes, and helping set up independent certifiers to act as watchdogs. But too many international green groups, Wen notes, avoid this hands-on approach, instead staying in Beijing, writing papers and trying to influence national policy. Nor have governments really stepped in on a local level, either. In 2005, Beijing invited officials from California to persuade Jiangsu's provincial government that it could save money by conserving energy rather than by building new coal-fired plants. Since then, other provinces have expressed interest in similar partnerships, yet Congress has given such efforts only sporadic attention.

Offering technical advice on, say, energy efficiency may sound perversely trivial in the face of the runaway destruction of the Chinese landscape. But, for now, steps like these may be the best remedy China could receive for its ailing environment—at least until the Chinese public begins demanding greener growth and even more robust protection.

Bradford Plumer

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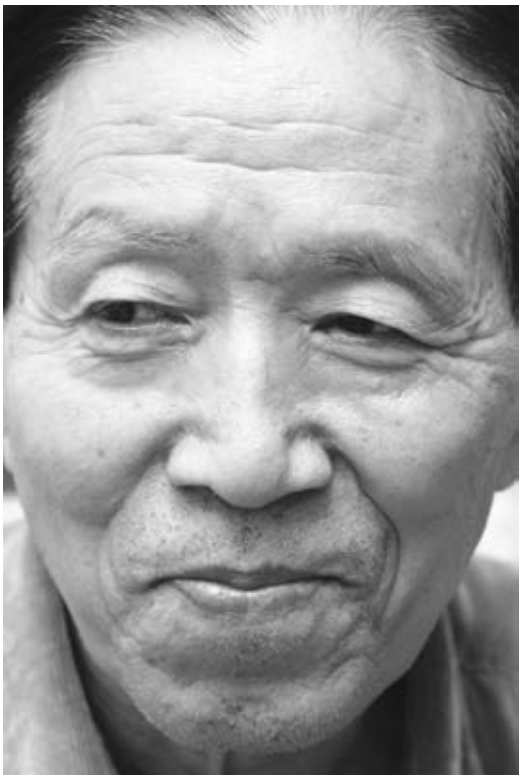
The Last Hero of Tiananmen

How an aging doctor became the conscience of China.

PHILIP P. PAN

In the second half of 2003, Jiang Yanyong sat down to write a letter about what he had seen during the Tiananmen Square uprising and share it with the party's new leaders. Jiang had had a unique view of the massacre, and the words came easily, in a flood of suppressed memory and emotion. "I am a surgeon at the PLA No. 301 Hospital," he wrote.

> I was chief of the department of general surgery on June 4, 1989. On the night of June 3, I heard repeated broadcasts urging people to stay off the streets. At about 10 p.m., I was in my apartment when I heard the sound of continuous gunfire from the north. Several minutes later, my pager beeped. It was the emergency room calling me, and I rushed over. What I found was unimaginable—on the floor and the tables of the emergency room were seven young people, their faces and bodies covered with blood. Two of them were later confirmed dead by EKG. My head buzzed and I nearly passed out. I had been a surgeon for more than 30 years. I had treated wounded soldiers before, while on the medical team of the PLA railway corps that built the Chengdu-Kunming Railway. But their injuries resulted from unavoidable accidents during the construction process, while before my eyes, in Beijing, the magnificent capital of China, lying in front of me, were our own people, killed by our people's army, with weapons supplied by the people.



Jiang Yanyong, the doctor who dared challenge the Chinese government.

Jiang wrote about how he had struggled to save a young athlete who died on his operating table because the hospital didn't have enough blood. He recalled his conversation with an army major, an innocent bystander, who had been shot but counted himself lucky because an elderly man and a young child standing next to him were killed. He reported that tiny bullet fragments had shredded the organs of several patients and suggested soldiers had used special ammunition to cause more harm.

On page after page, over a period of months, Jiang poured his heart into the letter. Every spring, as the anniversary of the massacre approached, the party became nervous and mobilized to prevent any attempt to memorialize the victims. But people had not forgotten, Jiang wrote. They had been bullied into silence, but, with each passing year, their anger and frustration grew. Jiang urged the new leaders to take a new approach. They should admit the party was wrong to send troops into the square and order them to fire on unarmed civilians. They should address the pain of those who lost their loved ones in the massacre and acknowledge, at long last, that the protesters were not "thugs" or "counter-revolutionaries" but patriots calling for a better and more honest government.

It would have been a daring gesture for any doctor to write such a letter. But Jiang was no ordinary physician. He was also a national hero. In the spring of 2003, he had blown the whistle on the government's cover-up of the SARS epidemic, sharing information with foreign reporters about the spread of the deadly disease. As a result, the government had been forced to abandon its lies. It was a remarkable reversal, and it showed that one man with the courage of his convictions could challenge the party-state and not just survive but prevail. For a time, state media had portrayed Jiang as the honest doctor who dared to speak when others were silent, the man who stood up to party bosses and saved lives around the world.

It was February 2004 by the time Jiang finished showing drafts of his letter to friends and making the final changes to the document. Nearly a year had passed since he exposed the SARS cover-up, and the National People's Congress was preparing to convene again. The fifteenth anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre was just months away. From Jiang's perspective, the timing was perfect. He made 80 copies of the letter and prepared a list of the nation's top officials, including the leaders of the Congress. He sent most of the letters by express mail from his local post office. He asked a few well-connected friends to hand-deliver others. Finally, he gave several copies to his superiors at the hospital and asked them to pass them up through official channels. Then he went home to wait for a response.

Jiang was a semiretired military surgeon at the No. 301 Hospital when he exposed the SARS cover-up. Seventy-one, with a long, crinkled face and a head of hair

TAOZI

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that he dyed black in the manner popular among aging intellectuals and party officials, Jiang had spent most of his life struggling with the contradictions of practicing medicine under Communist rule. Decades of party control and corruption had corroded the medical profession and its values. In its mildest form, this meant physicians accepting bribes from patients or prescribing unnecessary drugs to boost profits. At its worst, it meant the trade in organs from executed prisoners, the forced abortion of pregnancies violating the one-child policy, the psychiatric commitment of dissidents, even the euthanasia of infants born with severe disabilities. Doctors in China were trained as technicians to serve the state, to do their work and leave questions of ethics and public policy to others.

If it was a cynical time to be a doctor in China, Jiang had come to the profession in a more hopeful era. Born to a wealthy Shanghai banking family, he studied medicine at Peking University just as the Communists were taking power, and he trained at Peking Union Medical College, the nation's most prestigious medical school. He eagerly joined the party and enlisted in the People's Liberation Army even before graduating. He was inspired to specialize in surgery by the example of Norman Bethune, the Canadian battlefield surgeon who joined the Red Army and was eulogized by Mao as a martyr after his death in the Second Sino-Japanese War.

Jiang's idealism was shattered not long after he was assigned to the staff of the No. 301 Hospital in 1957. His brothers were persecuted in the Anti-Rightist Campaign, and he came under attack himself in the Cultural Revolution. Imprisoned in the hospital, he endured beatings and public condemnations because of his privileged family background. Later, he spent five lonely years on a prison farm in the remote deserts of Qinghai Province in western China, separated from his wife and children. Mao's rule shook his faith in the party, but Jiang was the kind of man who needed to believe in something, and, when he finally returned to Beijing and the No. 301 Hospital, he committed himself to the values of his profession. If he could not change society, he decided, he could at least do right by his patients. By the time of the Tiananmen demonstrations in 1989, Jiang had developed a reputation as one of the nation's finest surgeons. He served as the hospital's chief of general surgery and counted senior party officials and their relatives as former patients. After the massacre, the party asked him to express support for the suppression of the student-led democracy movement, but Jiang resisted. The hospital responded by easing him into retirement.

Yet the hospital retained Jiang as a member of its experts' committee and continued to call on him to perform operations and consult on difficult cases. It was in that role that he heard about cases of "atypical pneumonia" spreading rapidly from patients to hospital staff. It soon became clear to Jiang that this "atypical pneumonia" was the same disease that had struck hospitals around the world and that the World Health Organization was calling SARS. After hearing the minister of health, a fellow doctor, declare on television, "I can tell you all responsibly that it is safe to work, live, and travel in China," Jiang grew furious, and the intensity of his outrage surprised him. He had been a party member long enough to understand how common it was for government officials to lie to the public. But this was somehow worse. Jiang knew that SARS was a dangerous disease and that a major epidemic could be in the works in Beijing. "As a doctor," he later told me, "I felt I had a duty to tell the truth." He e-mailed the state press, and eventually, when nothing happened, he sent the e-mails on to friends, who relayed them to the foreign press. Soon, the world knew of China's SARS epidemic.

Faced with condemnation abroad and growing skepticism at home, the new president and party leader, Hu Jintao, decided the cover-up was no longer tenable and ordered an end to the lies. But, even as the government worked to contain the epidemic, Jiang felt a pang of guilt. The SARS cover-up was not the first time he had to decide whether to keep quiet about party wrongdoing. He had confronted a similar choice after the Tiananmen massacre. At the time, he believed he had acted honorably. But now, as the public praised his integrity and hailed him as the "honest doctor" who exposed the SARS cover-up, those feelings of shame and remorse were stronger than ever. If one person speaking truth to power could change history, as he had shown in the SARS crisis, then why had he remained quiet for so long about Tiananmen? Although Jiang had escaped serious punishment after speaking out on SARS, he knew there were great risks to speaking out again. But he had gained a measure of fame and political capital, and he resolved to use it on behalf of the victims of Tiananmen and their families.

Jiang's letter made for a dramatic story: The elderly surgeon who had forced the government to abandon the SARS cover-up was now challenging the party to come clean on the Tiananmen massacre. The full text of the letter was published on Internet sites overseas, and copies circulated throughout Beijing, where some people began selling them in the city's underground book markets.

At first, the authorities responded with restraint. No one came to put him under house arrest or drag him to prison in handcuffs, as the police sometimes did to those who spoke out about Tiananmen. Instead, they sent various officials who urged him again and again to admit he was wrong to send the letter. He refused. Gradually, they stepped up the pressure. When Jiang arranged to travel to western China to oversee an operation on an old patient, they assigned an official to accompany him, and then, at the airport, they suddenly tried to stop him from leaving before he boarded the plane. When he made plans to attend a literary conference in Beijing, a half-dozen officials showed up at his home and tried to persuade him not to go, and, when he insisted, they told him he couldn't use the hospital's car service. He hailed a cab and went anyway.

In late March, three senior officials in the military's discipline department began meeting with Jiang and questioning him at length. The officials challenged Jiang to prove parts of the letter—his estimate that hundreds of people were killed in the massacre, his claim that soldiers fired bullets that fragmented and shredded organs. The doctor told them that, if the number of deaths was in question, they could check with city hospitals and come up with a more accurate figure. As for the bullets, he acknowledged he was not a weapons specialist, and he offered to issue a clarification saying that he could only confirm that tiny metal fragments were discovered in the wounds of several patients, and that photos and x-rays taken at the time would back him up.

Finally, after about two weeks, the men showed Jiang a lengthy printout of their interview notes. He read through it carefully, made a few corrections, and signed his name.

The next several weeks passed uneventfully, and Jiang began to wonder if the party had decided not to take action against him after all. Every summer, he and his wife traveled to the United States to visit their daughter and grandson in California, and he reserved

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tickets on a flight in mid-June and applied for a visa at the American Embassy. But, in late May, as the fifteenth anniversary of the Tiananmen massacre approached, his superiors began trying to persuade him to leave Beijing and "recuperate" outside the city somewhere. Every year, the police forced prominent dissidents to leave the capital and spend the anniversary of the massacre elsewhere, and Jiang assumed that he had now made that list of "troublemakers." He insisted there was no need for him to leave, adding that there would be plenty of time for him to "recuperate" in California.

On June 1, Jiang and his wife were scheduled to visit the American Embassy for their visa interviews. The first sign something was wrong came when the young soldier assigned by the hospital to drive them showed up with a small van instead of the regular car, which he said was being repaired. Then, after they boarded the van, he drove toward a rear gate of their apartment compound, telling them there was too much traffic at the main gate. Suddenly, he stopped short, the doors flung open, and eight large soldiers rushed in and pinned Jiang and his wife to their seats.

A half-hour later, the van arrived at a military guesthouse on the outskirts of Beijing, and the soldiers escorted Jiang and his wife to a conference room inside. Several officials were waiting. "We have invited you here for your own safety," said one. "June 4 is approaching, and there will be various people outside looking for you, which would be harmful for your security. Here, you can rest, study, and improve your understanding."

Jiang was furious. He demanded to see a formal document approving his detention. The officials said they did not have one but promised to show him one soon. "You haven't even received formal approval, but you can arrest people?" Jiang asked. "What's the use of the constitution then?" He demanded pen and paper and quickly scribbled out two letters. The first was a letter of protest addressed to Hu Jintao, accusing the men who had detained him of acting without regard to the law or the party's policies. The second was a letter expressing his desire to resign from the military. He asked the men to pass both letters up the chain of command. They agreed, and then they left.

The doctor assumed at first that he had been detained as part of the government's regular security sweep before the June 4 anniversary and that he would be released soon afterward. But, as the anniversary came and went and he remained in custody, Jiang realized something else was happening. His days were divided into "rest time" and "study time," and, during the "study sessions," military officials grilled him about his letter and tried to pressure him into retracting it. Jiang resisted and went on a hunger strike. The next day, officials announced that his detention had been extended another week.

Then, a week later, he was told he was being detained under party regulations that allowed him to be held indefinitely. His wife could go home, but he would have to stay until he "changed his thinking" and "improved his understanding." Jiang had survived the Cultural Revolution, so he was familiar with the party's indoctrination methods—the lengthy interrogations, the ideological harangues, the daily demands for written statements. The pressure in these "study sessions" was intense, especially for a man of his age. Some of the officials berated him and tried to scare him into backing down. Others adopted a softer approach, gently urging him to consider the party's point of view. But, day after day, he stood by his letter.

As the weeks passed, Jiang began searching for a way to persuade the authorities to release him. He settled on a medical metaphor to illustrate his "improved understanding" of the Tiananmen massacre. There were costs and benefits to using troops to suppress the student protests, he wrote. If the benefits outweighed the costs, then one might take such action. "The situation could be likened to that of a patient with rectal cancer," he continued. "With surgery, he might live and that would be a benefit, but the colostomy would make life inconvenient and that would be a cost. Comparing the major benefit of living with the minor cost of a colostomy, the benefits still outweigh the costs, so the surgery should take place. . . . On June 4th, hundreds of students and ordinary people were killed. This was an extremely high cost to pay. But in the end, the Communist Party was not toppled, the People's Republic was not overthrown, and this was also a significant benefit."

That was as far as Jiang was willing to go. He hoped the authorities would focus on his conciliatory tone instead of his refusal to endorse the massacre. He hoped they would overlook the fact that he had just compared the party to a dying cancer patient who could no longer have normal bowel movements and was likely to suffer impotence and incontinence.

Seven weeks after Jiang was detained, the authorities suddenly sent him home. He had to stay in his apartment, accept restrictions on his ability to see and talk to people, stop using e-mail, and disconnect his Internet line. But at least he was home.

Jiang never learned why he was released. His more conciliatory statement might have been a factor. The officials assigned to reeducate him might have concluded that that was the closest they would ever get to an admission of guilt from such a stubborn old man. Or maybe the party's leaders recognized the risk they were taking by arresting a man who had become a hero for exposing the SARS cover-up. If they had not released him, he would have become the nation's most famous political prisoner.

The government never charged Jiang with a crime, and he was finally released from house arrest in March 2005. Afterward, though, he disappeared from public view. When I last visited him, he turned up the volume on his television set because he believed his apartment might be bugged, and he whispered that he was trying to avoid provoking the government. He said he still wanted to visit his daughter and grandson in California, and he believed that, if he behaved, the authorities would give him permission to go. As I listened to him speak, I couldn't help but feel a pang of disappointment. The state had been unable to break Jiang, but it had succeeded in silencing him.

After I left his apartment, though, I decided it was unfair to expect the elderly doctor to continue standing up to the party. He had already achieved more than most and paid a price for it. I doubted the government would ever let him visit his daughter and grandson, but how could anyone expect him to give up that hope? There was only so much one man could do, and only so much a nation could ask of him. ◆

Philip P. Pan is the former Beijing bureau chief for The Washington Post. *This piece is adapted from his new book* Out of Mao's Shadow: The Struggle for the Soul of a New China. *Reprinted by permission of Simon & Schuster, Inc.*

ANTHONY RUSSO

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- member report #1456
- member report #12342
"He's a cat hater."
- member report #11222
"Don't expect him to negotiate."
- member report #3462
"No pressure. Just honest and professional."
- member report #4160
"...the price was excellent given the detail involved..."
- member report #11454
"It's a shame we only see him when something breaks."
- member report #8165
"These employees love what they do and it shows."
- member report #6942
"Their mothers would be very proud."
- member report #13456
"We kicked them out before something else happened."
- member report #3425
"I wish every home project would go this smoothly."
- member report #2319
"Absolutely outstanding."
- member report #2011
"They never showed up and never called..."
- member report #8765
"Received an apology from the owner and gift certificate to dinner."
- member report #8356
"What a mess!"
- member report #1737
"...clean shaven and most professional looking..."
- member report #2737
"Went to small claims court – we won."
- member report #1099
"...they were Johnny on the spot..."
- member report #7477
"I can't believe how great it looks and how inexpensive it was."
- member report #9273
"They did it in just a couple of days."
- member report #13772
"They will help you lift things out of your car and so on."
- member report #12222
"...not the electrician to call if you have pets."
- member report #1313
"I had to hire someone else to redo half the job."
- member report #10232
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"My wife wanted him to stay for dinner."
- member report #17852
"Made me feel like I was their only client."
- member report #9832
"They were here two hours and charged me $840."
- member report #9323
"...make sure you ask for the discount..."
- member report #11357
"We waited almost two weeks for our appointment."
- member report #6783
"He treated my house like it was his own!"
- member report #4592
"A first
"The workers
"They were friendly,
"...destroyed part of my lawn
"He understood
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Deconstructing Barry

A literary critic reads Obama.

ANDREW DELBANCO

JOSHUA LOTT/STRINGER/GETTY IMAGES

"*Le style, c'est l'homme*," a Frenchman said a long time ago. If style is indeed the man, and the man is on the verge of being nominated for the presidency of the United States, it seems the moment to ask what his style might tell us about his mind and heart.

Many Americans have already decided what they think about this question. Some find in Barack Obama's eloquence the promise that he will be a leader of insight and inspiration. Others distrust his verbal fluency and feel he is nothing more than a smooth-talking huckster. I know discerning people on both sides of the question. And, since there is no evident correlation between eloquence and executive leadership (Washington was an indifferent writer, Lincoln a great one), it may not be possible to know who's right except in retrospect.

Even after his breakout into national prominence, Obama has remained a largely unknown politician whose air of destiny can make him seem distant and opaque. Yet, by listening closely to his language, I think we can learn something about who he really is.

Everyone, pro and con, seems to agree that he is an unusually gifted writer. So gifted, in fact, that the biographer and critic Arnold Rampersad describes himself as "taken aback, even astonished" by the "clever tricks" and "inventions for literary effect" he finds in Obama's books. Consider this account in his memoir, *Dreams from My Father*, of playing basketball in prep school, which starts with short sentences, each ending in a percussive or sibilant monosyllable, then moves into a run-on sentence that mimics the flow of the game:

> By the time I reached high school, I was playing on Punahou's teams, and could take my game to the university courts, where a handful of black men, mostly gym rats and has-beens, would teach me an attitude that didn't just have to do with sport. That respect came from what you did and not who your daddy was. That you could talk stuff to rattle an opponent, but that you should shut the hell up if you couldn't back it up. That you didn't let anyone sneak up behind you to see emotions—

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like hurt or fear—you didn't want them to see.

And something else, too, something nobody talked about: a way of being together when the game was tight and the sweat broke and the best players stopped worrying about their points and the worst players got swept up in the moment and the score only mattered because that's how you sustained the trance. In the middle of which you might make a move or a pass that surprised even you, so that even the guy guarding you had to smile, as if to say, "Damn . . ."

This is a young writer (he was around 30 when he wrote *Dreams*) strutting his stuff. Sometimes he overwrites, as when he describes police cars cruising past groups of sullen black teens in "barracuda silence" or compares a row of scrappy trees to "hair swept across a bald man's head." He has a habit—almost a tic—of throwing in a cinematic flourish when none is needed: "a spotted, mangy cat" runs among weeds with a crumbling housing project in the background; a torn poster-photo of the recently dead Chicago mayor, Harold Washington, tumbles down a windswept street. And, as Rampersad suggests, he is a master of sleight of hand, as when, recounting his trip to Kenya as a young man in search of traces of his father, he takes what were clearly multiple conversations with his half-sister and stitches them into a seamless family history.

But none of these techniques strikes me as a "trick"—a word that implies fraudulence. What struck me instead about *Dreams from My Father* is the feeling that through and beyond the local details the writing opens out into universal experience. Obama describes his childhood in Hawaii, where his white Midwestern mother and his black African father met as students, in language so vivid that we almost taste the "rice candy with edible wrappers" and feel the relief from the tropical heat in the "cool rush of Manoa Falls, with its ginger blossoms and high canopies filled with the sound of invisible birds."

But sooner or later in this Eden the serpent will make an appearance. And so she does—in the form of a red-haired girl in his fifth-grade class, who asks, with a hint of prurience, if she can touch his hair. Having been raised largely unaware of race, Obama begins to notice that "Cosby never got the girl on *I Spy*" and that the "black man on *Mission Impossible* spent all his time underground." The schoolgirl's question is followed by the shock of coming upon a photo in *Life* magazine of a black man, his skin blotched and made pallid by a "chemical treatment" he had "paid for . . . with his own money" in an effort to bleach out his blackness.

I am imputing a theme here—the fall from paradise—that Obama suggests only lightly even as he tends to group his memories into episodes of temptation and redemption. In a chapter on his college years, he hints at having been tempted by drugs and what he calls "African nationalism." After college, playing half-willingly the role of Model Minority in a New York consulting firm, he fears the "beauty, the filth, the noise" of the great city, where, in order to resist its allure, he takes "on the temperament if not the convictions of a street corner preacher, prepared to see temptation everywhere, ready to overrun a fragile will."

Fleeing to Chicago, he confronts new tempters—old pols, gangbangers turned radicals, and, most dangerous, the sins of wrath and despair—until he finds the promise of redemption in service itself.

It is in Chicago, where "the snowstorms rolled in, boundless prairie storms that set the sky close to the ground," that he gets to know the sort of people who seem wary of him today—"men and women who smoked a lot and didn't watch their weight, shopped at Sears or Kmart . . . and ate in Red Lobster on special occasions." Perhaps because he grew up in a fatherless house (his father left when Barack was barely two), he feels a special connection to the mothers and grandmothers, mainly but not only black, who harbor childhood memories of church-centered Southern towns, and of the tidy city to which they brought their hopes, before the meatpacking or auto-parts plant closed and their fathers, brothers, or husbands lost their jobs and dreams. He writes about these people with great sensitivity—watching through women's eyes as their children's "eyes stop laughing." He is touched by their practice of wrapping treasured sofas and carpets in protective plastic—to be peeled off, they still dare to hope, on the day when the family will rally for the graduation or wedding of a child who has not fallen to the drug culture of the streets.

The climactic section of the book is the account of his journey to Kenya—"a Westerner not entirely at home in the West, an African on his way to a land full of strangers"—in which he reverts to the lush language with which he had recounted his childhood in Hawaii. To his Western eyes, Kenya sometimes seems a picturesque "fable, a painting by Rousseau" in which lions yawn in peaceful repose while "a train of Masai women" passes by, "their heads shaven clean, their slender bodies wrapped in red *shukas*, their earlobes elongated and ringed with bright beads." The family members he comes to know—sisters, brothers, even a surviving grandmother—are warm and welcoming people, but this Eden, too, turns out to be a mirage.

On the one hand, it is a loving world where "nobody sends their parents to an old people's home or leaves their children with strangers"; on the other hand, it is a world of mud-and-dung huts where, witnessing a young mother with her child, he has to fight "the urge to brush away the flies that formed two solid rings around the baby's puffed eyes." Looking back in his imagination from this dual world to his native America, he sees its own dualities more clearly from the distance. Shooting hoops with a young half-brother in Kenya, he "tried to picture the basketball courts back in the States. The sound of gunshots nearby, a guy peddling nickel hits in the stairwell—that was one picture. The laughter of boys playing in their suburban backyard, their mother calling them in for lunch. That was true, too."

Obama's trip to Kenya, where he learns about the dashing but ultimately defeated father whom he barely knew, seems to free him from his enervating struggle to overcome temptation and find redemption. There is a feeling of release as he comes back home with a deepened appreciation of the complexities of history and a sense of his own opportunities and obligations in America.

Obama's second book, *The Audacity of Hope*, which takes its title from a sermon by the now-notorious Jeremiah Wright, was written a decade after *Dreams from My Father*. It is less personal and more miscellaneous—a set of loosely linked reflections on the effects of the press on politics, on the compromising clubbiness of the Senate, on the insularity of powerful people living in a kind of quarantine that only beneficiaries and would-be benefactors can violate. Though here and there his literary instincts reassert themselves (there's a nice description of the "python curves" of the Mississippi as seen from the air), this is basically a policy book in which the writing is more efficient than expressive. We get some familiar lamentation about gridlock politics—about the effects of gerrymandering or the irony that the filibuster, once an instrument used by reactionaries

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to obstruct liberal legislation, is now used (or threatened) by liberals to obstruct the appointment of reactionary judges. Sometimes the whole book seems a farewell to, or at least a rationale for leaving, the Senate.

Yet the voice of the writer is fundamentally the same as the one we hear in *Dreams*. There is the same internal counterpoise in the sentences: "Most evangelicals are more tolerant than the media would have us believe, most secularists more spiritual" … "most rich people want the poor to succeed, and most of the poor are more self-critical and hold higher aspirations than the popular culture allows." When he scans the human landscape, Obama tends to notice contradictory individuals more than coherent interest groups. His sentences are alive because they are in tension with themselves:

> I imagine the white Southerner who growing up heard his dad talk about niggers this and niggers that but who has struck up a friendship with the black guys at the office and is trying to teach his own son different, who thinks discrimination is wrong but doesn't see why the son of a black doctor should get admitted into law school ahead of his own. Or the former Black Panther who decided to go into real estate, bought a few buildings in the neighborhood, and is just as tired of the drug dealers in front of those buildings as he is of the bankers who won't give a loan to expand his business. There's the middle-aged feminist who still mourns her abortion, and the Christian woman who paid for her teenager's abortion …

This is the writing of someone trying to map a route through a world where choices are less often between good and bad than between competing goods. Though it lacks the sensual immediacy of the earlier book, the language is open and unresolved, the sentences organized around pairs of sentiments or arguments that exert equal force against each other—a reflection of ongoing thinking rather than a statement of settled thoughts.

Both these books are the work of a dialectical mind. Both are written by someone who believes in progress but not that all liberal social programs constitute progress. "By detaching income from work," he writes of "the old AFDC program" (Aid to Families with Dependent Children), it "sapped people of their initiative and eroded their self-respect." He has an Orwellian alertness to how easily language degenerates into cant, as when the term of praise "bipartisan" is used to dress up a sacrifice of principle by the weaker party in a political dispute. And he understands the presence of the past in public life—not only of recent history, as in his discussion of the Democratic Party since the breakdown of the New Deal coalition, but of distant history, as in his reflections on the imperiled idea of deliberative democracy as inherited from the founding fathers.

Remarkably enough for a contemporary politician, Obama's sense of the American past includes our literary past. His books are allusive—sometimes overtly, as when he dissents from F. Scott Fitzgerald ("in politics there may be second acts, but no second place"), sometimes obliquely, as when, relating an incident with a waiter in Nairobi, he echoes W.E.B. DuBois's famous passage in *The Souls of Black Folk* on "double consciousness." The waiter is a Kenyan citizen but still a colonial-minded servant fawning on white customers while snubbing blacks: "And so he straddles two worlds, uncertain in each, always off balance, playing whichever game staves off the bottomless poverty, careful to let his anger vent itself only on those in the same condition."

Writing recently in *The New York Times Book Review*, George Packer recommended that Obama read Theodore Dreiser's great Chicago novel *Sister Carrie*—in order, Packer wrote rather patronizingly, to learn about "the sort of American he doesn't know." If Obama hasn't already read Dreiser (I suspect he has), he needs no tutoring about the kinds of lives Dreiser wrote about—lives of unfocused longing, vulnerable to temptation and exploitation. Indeed there is a sense in which he brings together in his memoir, as Dreiser did in his fiction, the two basic American stories—stories of rising and stories of awakening. His books are "how-to" books about his own exemplary success at competing with others in the marketplace, but they are also conversion narratives about his discovery that serving others is the only way to save oneself.

It is hard for any writer, no matter how selective his memory or guarded his words, to conceal himself in his writing. I suspect (I've never met him) that the weaknesses and strengths of Obama's writing reflect those of his character—a virtuosity that tempts him to be pleased with himself and impatient with others, but also an awareness of human complexity that made me think of a writer to whom he does not allude, Henry James, whose criterion for the artist as someone "on whom nothing is lost" he meets.

Finally, one feels in Obama's books as well as his speeches the presence of that iconic American, Abraham Lincoln, whom he sometimes names and sometimes namelessly invokes. In *The Audacity of Hope*, he tells of having once received a rebuke ("not entirely undeserved") for presumptuously likening himself in print to Lincoln. On his first visit to the White House as a freshman senator, he tells us, Lincoln appeared to him as a ghostly figure "pacing the hall, shouldering the weight of a nation," the moral and political genius who managed to maintain "within himself the balance between two contradictory ideas—that we must talk and reach for common understandings, precisely because all of us are imperfect and can never act with the certainty that God is on our side; and yet at times we must act nonetheless, as if we are certain, protected from error only by providence."

This description of Lincoln as a man of self-doubt yet with an unswerving sense of mission is as instructive as it is insightful. Obama seems to have composed his public life in conscious emulation of Lincoln. He announced his candidacy in Springfield and delivered his speech on race in Philadelphia, where Lincoln, en route to his first inauguration, gave a great speech on the Declaration of Independence as America's secular scripture. In his victory speech on the night of clinching the Democratic nomination, Obama incorporated or played variations on several phrases from Lincoln—"the last full measure of devotion," "the last best hope of earth," "the better angels of our nature."

To some, it all seems calculated and hubristic, and they will no doubt continue to detect in his style a self-involved inwardness. But, to me, it feels like heartfelt homage from someone with a keen sense of the complexities and commonalities of human experience. On the hopeful premise that style really does tell us something about the man, this man—to my ear, at least—is the real deal. ◆

Andrew Delbanco teaches at Columbia, where he is Levi Professor in the Humanities and director of American Studies.

ANTHONY RUSSO

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The Pivot

The man who commercialized college basketball reconsiders.

JASON ZENGERLE

When Sonny Vaccaro talks, basketball stars like Carmelo Anthony listen.

JENNIFER POTTHEISER/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES

One evening last fall, Sonny Vaccaro came to the University of Maryland to give a speech. This was not itself unusual, since he is often invited to give speeches on campuses—specifically, locker-room talks to college basketball players. Vaccaro is not a natural orator—he has a high, raspy voice, and his words run together as he rambles from one topic to the next—but young athletes almost invariably listen to what he has to say. As a shoe company executive, an all-star game organizer, and a summer camp and tournament operator, the 68-year-old Vaccaro has been one of the most powerful—and controversial—men in basketball for nearly three decades. He is the sport's ultimate insider, the man who brokered the marriage between Michael Jordan and Nike that gave birth to Air Jordan; plucked a 15-year-old Tracy McGrady from basketball obscurity in rural Florida and put him on the path to NBA stardom; and played godfather to myriad successful college basketball coaches, most notably Ben Howland, who reportedly owes his job at UCLA to Vaccaro's lobbying. "I helped them make millions and millions of dollars," Vaccaro boasts. If that help has led some critics to brand him a "sneaker pimp" who wields undue influence over the game, it's endeared him to others. When the NBA holds its annual draft on June 26 in New York City, Vaccaro will be there as the guest of at least three players expected to be taken in the first round. As one of those players, O.J. Mayo, who began keeping Vaccaro's counsel as a ninth-grader, has put it: "Sonny's kind of a man in the back."

Maryland seemed a logical venue for one of Vaccaro's pep talks. He's an old pal of Maryland's basketball coach, Gary Williams, and the school's team—which won the NCAA championship in 2002—is stocked with the sort of elite players whom Vaccaro makes it his business to have befriended before they even have drivers' licenses. But Vaccaro wasn't at Maryland to give a locker-room speech. He was there to deliver a lecture to a group of students. Vaccaro, who has salt-and-pepper hair and dark eyebrows that frame an open, sallow face, stood at the front of a large classroom. Although he is most comfortable in sweatsuits and sneakers, on this evening he wore a sweater and

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dress shoes, doing his best to approximate professorial attire. Still, the 200 or so undergrads in attendance weren't the automatically captivated audience he was accustomed to. "How many of you know who I am?" Vaccaro asked as he paced in front of the lectern. About five students raised their hands. "How many of you have an opinion of me?" he continued. Only a couple of students signaled that they did. Vaccaro was incredulous. "That's all? None of you other guys have an opinion of me?" He resolved to make the best of this unusual anonymity. "That's wonderful," he said. "That means tonight I have your minds. Hopefully, tomorrow morning, I have your souls."

Vaccaro had come to Maryland to enlist the students in what he described as his "new venture." He had resolved that he was no longer "going to go speak to the basketball teams or the football teams or give them a ra-ra speech." Instead, he wanted to "go to schools and speak to kids who aren't basketball players and football players"—the kids who line up and camp out in tents for tickets; the kids who pack the arenas and stadiums and scream themselves hoarse rooting for State U; the kids who, even more than the athletes, make college sports the cultural phenomenon that it is today. He had a simple message for them. "The NCAA," he told the students, "is the most fraudulent organization that ever lived."

Last year, Vaccaro quit his job as a top Reebok executive. He shuttered his summer tournament. He turned out the lights on his high school all-star game. He abandoned all of the official positions and institutions that had made him a basketball power broker. "I left for the main reason so I could be free to talk," Vaccaro told me. "I'm not selling shoes, I'm not working for anybody. If people ask what's in it for me, there's nothing now." Since making his clean break, Vaccaro has waged a single-minded campaign against college athletics' governing body, the NCAA. "I'm going for the jugular," he says. He's visited Harvard, Yale, and Duke, among other schools, to speak to students about the evils of the NCAA. He's gone to Capitol Hill to lobby Congress to investigate the NCAA's tax-exempt status. He's buttonholed NBA players about negotiating a new collective bargaining agreement in such a way that it would hurt the NCAA. And he's searched for young, up-and-coming basketball phenoms who might blaze a new trail to the NBA that doesn't go through the college ranks.

Vaccaro believes the NCAA is fraudulent for two fundamental reasons: The first is that the NCAA is more devoted to business than to education; and the second is that the NCAA makes its money by exploiting the talents of the young men it is supposed to be educating. "They're not good people, the NCAA," Vaccaro told me. "It's a one-sided street; all the money goes to them." Vaccaro is revolted by the hypocrisy that's become engrained in the culture of college athletics—the insistence that the athletes are students, that the coaches are teachers (not "mercenaries" and "hired guns," as he calls them), and that "college sports," as NCAA president Myles Brand has declared, "is not a business." If Vaccaro's life is a testament to anything, it's that college sports is a business. And his new mission is to ensure that the people who contribute most to that business, the athletes, get something in return. "My goal," Vaccaro says, "is to get freedom for these kids."

At Maryland, he spoke for more than an hour in a headlong rush, at some points literally frothing at the mouth as he tried to persuade the students about the perfidy of the NCAA. One moment he was complaining about the NBA's "one-and-done" rule—which, since being instituted in 2006, prohibits basketball players from entering the league until they're at least 19 and one year removed from high school, and which has been a boon to the NCAA since those athletes now spend that year playing college basketball instead of going straight to the pros. Next, he was railing against the NCAA for selling ESPN the rebroadcast rights to old college basketball games without giving any money to the athletes who played in them. Then he was off on a tangent about college football's Bowl Championship Series. If Vaccaro was at times hard to follow, there was no doubting his passion. "I want you to carry the word," he beseeched the students.

Vaccaro is hardly the first person to criticize the NCAA. For years, would-be reformers have authored reports and issued "calls to action" decrying the corrupt nature of college athletics. But, for all that time, the movement to reform college sports has consisted primarily of academics who are largely outsiders to the world of athletics; perhaps relatedly, the movement has made little progress. As an insider, Vaccaro presents the college sports reform movement with an opportunity that holds both peril and potential. At one level, Vaccaro could harm the cause of reform by sullying it. Is the man who boasts of having "written a check to everyone" really the person best-suited to cleaning up college athletics? At the same time, Vaccaro, more than anyone else in the movement, knows the nature of the enemy—having once been the enemy. Vaccaro used his undeniable talents to help build college sports into the corrupt behemoth it is today. The question now is whether he can use those same talents to tear the whole thing down.

THERE ARE PEOPLE who quite literally hold Sonny Vaccaro responsible for destroying American basketball. According to his critics, Vaccaro created a set of incentives that fundamentally retards the development of young American players. These players practice dunking rather than shooting jumpers, since lucrative shoe contracts go to the flashiest athletes, not the most fundamentally sound ones. They become spoiled and coddled and thus uncoachable, since the shoe companies' desperate search for the next Michael Jordan leads them to shower free merchandise on players as young as ten years old. And then they leave college early to make millions in the NBA, even though they're not yet ready for the rigors of the pro game, as their permanently occupied seats on the bench for the initial years of their pro careers attest. "Vaccaro's empire and influence disrupts development at every level," Brian McCormick, a coach who runs a California basketball academy, has written. "Vaccaro's empire turned basketball up-side down." Indeed, after the U.S. men's basketball team failed to win a gold medal at the 2004 Summer Olympic Games in Athens, "summer basketball"—that is, Vaccaro—received nearly as much blame for the performance as the team's players and coaches.

Vaccaro has a one-word response to the accusation that he ruined American basketball: "Bullshit." But he's willing to cop to the charge that he professionalized—and, in some senses, corrupted—college basketball. In fact, it's something he's quite proud of. That basketball is the sport in which Vaccaro, who has described himself as "this fat little dago," made his living is a bit of a mystery—even to him. "I don't look like it, I don't talk like it, I don't feel like it," he says. "All the things that a young basketball player was then, and is now, I wasn't."

Born John Paul (his mother later dubbed him Sonny for his disposition), he was a baseball and football star growing up in Western Pennsylvania, but a back injury curtailed any dreams he had of playing professionally. After graduating from Youngstown State University, he returned home and took a job teaching special education in his old school district. He also had a number of businesses on the side, from running sports

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camps to promoting rock concerts. One of the things Vaccaro did in his off-hours in 1964 was found an all-star game for high school basketball players called the Dapper Dan Roundball Classic. Although the Dapper Dan was held in Pittsburgh, it drew players from all over the country, making it the first national high school all-star game. As such, it became a must-see event for college coaches, many of whom became Vaccaro's friends.

In the early '70s, Vaccaro left Pennsylvania behind (save for return trips to Pittsburgh to run the Dapper Dan) for Las Vegas, where he eked out a living as a professional gambler. He was still on the lookout for business opportunities, and, in 1977, he convinced a shoemaker friend to build some prototypes of a sandal-like basketball shoe he wanted to pitch to a then-fledgling Oregon shoe company called Nike. Nike executives weren't interested in Vaccaro's shoes, but they were intrigued by his basketball knowledge. They asked him for his thoughts about how Nike, which was then focused mostly on running shoes, could break into the basketball market, and Vaccaro tossed out the idea that forever changed college hoops: He suggested Nike pay college basketball coaches to put its shoes on their players. Initially, Nike didn't have to pay the coaches much. "In the '70s, college coaches weren't making $2.5 million a year," Vaccaro says. "They were making twenty-five thousand dollars a year and ran a summer camp and maybe got an automobile from the local Dodge dealership." The promise of a few thousand dollars plus free shoes was too good an offer for the coaches to pass up. But Nike execs were reluctant to trust Vaccaro, whom some suspected of being a Mafioso, with even the little sums: When he first began signing up his coaching friends in 1978, he had to write them checks from his personal account, into which Nike then wired money. "I was actually giving an illegal check to these guys, hoping it wouldn't bounce," he recalls. By the mid-'80s, after Vaccaro's strategy helped Nike boost its basketball-shoe sales from $7 million to $400 million each year, the firm had given Vaccaro access to the company checkbook and a budget of $3.5 million. He needed it, since by then some coaches, such as Georgetown's John Thompson, were making hundreds of thousands of dollars a year from their Nike contracts.

Vaccaro extended his influence in other ways. In 1984, he founded the ABCD Summer Basketball Camp. Prior to ABCD, the most prominent summer camps, such as Five Star, consisted of a series of drills and scrimmages, designed to improve the campers' skills. ABCD, by contrast, was intended to be a stage for the nation's top high school players. "I wanted to give them a platform," Vaccaro says. He invited the top 120 to come to ABCD for a week and, after some perfunctory college-prep classes in the morning, scrimmage against one another in the afternoons and evenings. The camp was like catnip for college coaches and, increasingly, NBA scouts, who could see all the top players in the country in one place. Some players used ABCD as the stage on which to make the case that they were worthy of a scholarship from a college basketball powerhouse. Others—such as Kobe Bryant, Tracy McGrady, and LeBron James—used ABCD to prove that they were talented enough to go straight from high school to the NBA. Indeed, by the early '90s, the ABCD camp and national summer tournaments of AAU teams—including one in Las Vegas that Vaccaro put on—had become more important than the high school season when it came to evaluating young basketball players.

Vaccaro had made himself an integral part of the college basketball landscape. But, since his various activities took place at some remove from the actual schools—his shoe contracts were with the coaches; his summer camps took place when school was out—the universities could tell themselves that their tacit partnership with him wasn't corrupting higher education. That changed in 1987, when Vaccaro signed a lucrative contract with the University of Miami to outfit all of its teams in Nike gear. "They finally made a deal with the devil, me being the devil and Nike being the ultimate devil," says Vaccaro. "We wrote the check to Miami, they paid the coaches. . . . That's the day they became a commercial entity. That's the day they became a business partner to a business. . . . That's the day they sold their soul away."

The soul-selling has only continued. The mother of all business deals in college athletics is the NCAA's eleven-year, $6 billion contract with CBS to broadcast its men's basketball tournament. (About 90 percent of the NCAA's $560 million in annual revenue comes from the CBS contract.) But the NCAA has smaller promotional deals with other corporate entities, from The Hartford financial group to DiGiorno frozen pizza. Even the ladders that the winning players climb to cut down the nets after the national championship basketball game have a sponsor. And it's not just promotions. For the past two men's basketball tournaments, the NCAA has sought to create a new revenue stream by partnering with an online ticket broker, which resells Final Four tickets at hundreds of dollars over their face value. In other words, the NCAA is effectively scalping its own tickets. Meanwhile, NCAA executives pull down salaries that are more befitting of business executives than educators: In 2005–2006, Myles Brand made more than $895,000.

Of course, Vaccaro has made a small fortune off the game, too. But, even when he was working within the system he helped create, he had his misgivings. "Look, I play by the rules," he told *The New York Times*' Robert Lipsyte in 1997. "What I am saying is, for God's sake, go change the rules." Yet, despite his qualms, Vaccaro for many years rationalized staying in the game by claiming that his departure wouldn't change anything. After leaving Nike in 1991, he went on to try to do the same thing for Adidas and then for Reebok. Eventually, however, Vaccaro realized that his criticisms of the system would carry far more weight if he wasn't part of it. "I spoke as Sonny Vaccaro the individual, but I also spoke for Nike, Adidas, and Reebok," he says. "So, when they said to me that I wanted to sell shoes, they were right, I did want to sell shoes." Now that he's gone, Vaccaro thinks things have actually gotten worse. "I brought a little bit of organization to the chaos," he told me. "You wouldn't believe some of the shit that's going on now."

After his speech at Maryland, Vaccaro headed to an Italian restaurant in Washington, D.C., for a late dinner. He was joined by a good-sized entourage that included the mother of NBA star Grant Hill and a sportswriter whom he was talking to about ghostwriting his autobiography. (The book would presumably make for a good tie-in with the movie about Vaccaro that HBO is developing, with James Gandolfini starring as Sonny.) But the dining companion on whom Vaccaro lavished most of his attention was a staffer on the House Judiciary Committee; Vaccaro had invited him along for one reason. "I want to testify," he told the staffer in between slurps of soup. "I want to put my left hand down, put my right hand up, and say I'll tell nothing but the truth so help me God. I'm begging you."

The dinner was one of several conversations Vaccaro has had in the past year with people on Capitol Hill about potential congressional hearings into the NCAA's tax-exempt status. Since it was founded in 1906 as a response to an

continued on page 31

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Which Way to Education Excellence?

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On May 14, 2008, The New Republic held an informal discussion with leaders from the national education community to discuss the challenges facing public education, the future of education reform, and the need for the next president to address this country's education crisis.

FRANKLIN FOER

We're here today, with an incredibly distinguished panel, to talk about a most essential issue at an incredibly interesting moment. Education is one of the great reform issues of our time, and we have two presidential candidates who consider themselves reformers, so education should play a monumental role in this election.

And now I'll turn things over to our panelists.

EDUCATION STANDARDS THAT ENSURE AMERICAN ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

FRANK SESNO

Can the United States compete in a global economy if it's losing the arms race in education?

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SPEAKERS

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Strong American Schools
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JOEL KLEIN
Chancellor,
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MIKE FEINBERG
Co-Founder,
Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP)

JOHN DEASY
Superintendent of Schools,
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No. Out of 30 industrial nations, we're 25th in math for 15-year-olds, and 21st in science. It's not that we've gone backwards in the last 30 years; it's that the rest of the world has made great progress. Economies are tied to skills and knowledge, and as we look to the next 20 to 40 years in this nation, we can expect a very sobering experience if we don't radically improve our educational product. The consequence of failing to improve this country's education is potentially disastrous.

The next president needs to make education a top priority. One projection shows that if we could increase our educational achievement to the average of those 30 nations, we would increase our gross national product by a half percent a year, and over 30 years that would produce enough income to pay for our total educational budget.

SESNO

Do the various constituent groups—parents, students, teachers, and principals—understand this urgency?

JOEL KLEIN

Of course not. If they did, people would be talking about it more; we'd have a much more frank and open discussion about it. If we don't have a very different discussion—and a much more open and public discussion—we're going to be missing the boat.

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SESNO
What do you want from the next administration?

JOHN DEASY
The whole conversation in this country around standards needs to be unified. There needs to be a set of very-agreed-upon American standards—higher, fewer, and deeper, meaning that what a youth learns in algebra in my county and what he learns in San Francisco and in New York City needs to be the same high-quality algebra, and there needs to be a common understanding of that curriculum: assessments that measure those standards at a level that is benchmarked against the top 10 countries in the world.

Teaching needs to be the iconic profession of this next century. We need to be able to produce teachers in far greater quantity, and they need to be much more skilled than they currently are. Investing in the teaching force is absolutely essential. We can attract more people to this profession by offering better forms of compensation and making tenure more meaningful.

CHESTER FINN
We've been running in place while the rest of the world has been accelerating. Families need good options like the Knowledge Is Power Program [aka KIPP, a nationwide network of free, open-enrollment college-preparatory public schools for students in under-resourced communities.]

SESNO
We have 50 states. How do you get 50 governors on board with something like this?

ROMER
In this political year, federal office-seekers are worried about states' rights, and that's part of what's blocking the conversation. The next president, whoever it is, ought to immediately call 50 governors and 50 state school officers and say: "I want to make a new deal with you. I want you to benchmark your standards to the 10 best nations in the world." In 90 days they'd come back with a model set of standards that would annually benchmark the United States against the 10 best nations in the world.

In some places this is already happening. The Achieve organization [a non profit that works to raise academic standards, improve assessments, and strengthen accountability to help prepare students for college and work] and others are now building that combination.

CHESTER FINN
"We have to pay teachers differently, deploy them differently, reward them differently, tenure them differently, pension them differently, and credential them differently. We have to keep out a lot of people who might like to be teachers but who don't want to jump through all the certification hoops."

The president then has to say, essentially: "I'll give you more time under No Child Left Behind, because we're setting a higher standard. And I'll give you money to design more authentic assessments, which I'll pay for." That way, the federal government is not intruding and demanding that you do it the federal way. It's a paradigm shift that we need to make.

DEASY
I think what you're suggesting is a very interesting new notion for a federal role in education. It's a convening role and it's a catalytic role, as opposed to a highly regulatory role and a role of direct control. It's a remarkable grand bargain: States get relieved of the cost of doing this high-quality, necessary work and have the opportunity to create a set of high-benchmark standards, and the assessments that go with those standards. And you're letting the professionals in the field create these benchmark standards. But this notion of a president who convenes and catalyzes is really significant.

KLEIN
I'm always astonished that people think you can compare the graduation rates in two different states. It's nuts. It depends what the requirements for graduation are in those different states, and we don't live in a state-based economy. We live in a global economy; our kids are going to have to compete in a global economy. We should have national standards and national assessments. If there aren't real federal teeth in this, the political imperatives at the local level will dominate. So, at a minimum, the federal government ought to condition its willingness to put in Title I [Improving The Academic Achievement Of The Disadvantaged] and other monies on really meaningful benchmark standards.

But those standards need to be national. Think of all the money that the 50 states spend on various assessments. If they were combined and we had real national assessments—a real set of requirements for what it meant to graduate high school in America—we'd be so much better off.

ROMER
If you were to compare the level of math being achieved by an eighth-grader in this country to that of a student in one of the 10 best nations, the eighth-grader in this

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country is probably a year to a year and a half below that of his counterpart. Parents need to be aware of how this translates in terms of the economic costs to that child's life.

ATTRACTING AND RETAINING QUALITY TEACHERS

SESNO
What about the teachers? How about holding them accountable?

KLEIN
Absolutely. You have got to have reasonable accountability metrics. You want to look at how teachers have moved their students forward. You can fundamentally close the achievement gap if you have good teachers. And those are the people who work at KIPP. High-quality teachers are the essential, indispensable ingredient. And we need to take teacher performance into consideration when granting tenure.

SESNO
How do you measure their performance?

MIKE FEINBERG
By seeing where the kids have started in each of the classrooms, and where they are at the end of the year, and measuring how far they've grown, and making sure that that is tied directly to what the teacher's value has been.

SESNO
Is that "teaching to the test"?

FEINBERG
Absolutely not. The test is just one piece of what we measure to the end goal of getting the kids to and through college.

DEASY
So teaching to the test is an obligation to teach what's on the test. Students have a right to know the material if they're going to be competitive. So "teaching to the test" is a bit of a pejorative expression. But teaching what's on the test is absolutely essential. Teachers need to be held to high standards of student progress. They have to know their material. They have to be able to teach the material. And there have to be results.

SESNO
Here's a fact: More than 70 percent of the math teachers in our middle schools lack even a college minor in math or a math-related field.

DEASY
That statistic is much, much higher in communities of great poverty.

JOHN DEASY
"Teaching needs to be the iconic profession of this next century."

And so in schools where most kids are poor, it may be that no math teachers hold a credential in mathematics. So that raises the issue of how we think about the distribution of human capital.

KLEIN
Well, this is an area where there's an irrational system. Colleges and universities don't pay math teachers what they pay teachers in other disciplines. There need to be pay differentials.

FINN
We have to pay differently, deploy people differently, reward them differently, tenure them differently, pension them differently, and credential them differently—keep out a lot of people who might like to be teachers but who don't want to jump through all the certification hoops. So we have got a lot of changes to make on the teaching force if we want to address this problem.

DEASY
We could actually have gold-star service academies for producing the best teachers in the country. The government could offer incentives to create these academies. The entrance level would be the same as that of medical school.

FEINBERG
The pay is also part of the equation. How are we going to keep teachers when they get there? And contentment and joy in the workplace are things we also have to work on. Our schools work, by and large, because of great teaching. We need to make sure that we're attracting great people to the profession. We need to train the next generation of school leaders to be great managers of not just children but of adults too.

MORE TIME AND SUPPORT FOR LEARNING

DEASY
We have the shortest school day and the shortest school year. It's remarkable how little actual time we spend actively instructing.

SESNO
Most countries ahead of us on international assessments keep their students in school longer each day, and school is in session for more weeks during the year. In fact, by one measure, kids in other countries are getting an extra year of school over the course of 12 years.

KLEIN
We should extend the school day. We should extend the school year. And we've done that. We've negotiated an additional 150 minutes a week for our kids who are strug-

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gling the most. So now there are about 300,000 students in New York City who get an additional 37.5 minutes, four days a week, and in classes of 10 or smaller.

SESNO

What incentive do you offer teachers to teach a longer day?

FEINBERG

Actually, we're finding some teachers that are already doing this. There are great teachers out there who already have their car in the parking lot at 7 in the morning, and their car in the parking lot at 5 in the afternoon. They're just doing it in isolation. We motivate them to come to KIPP, where all of the cars are there at 7, all of the cars are there at 5.

We also pay our teachers more. In fact, they get paid about 15 to 20 percent more than what they would be making in the traditional school system.

FINN

I don't think this necessarily has to be compulsory. It may be that one school has KIPP-like hours, and one has traditional-type hours. After you explain to the parents the relative costs and benefits of each approach, they pick which one they want.

SESNO

Has KIPP actually demonstrated that more school—longer school days, longer school years—leads to higher achievement?

FEINBERG

Well, 90 percent of our kids in Houston are going to and through college.

SESNO

Do you make that connection clear to the parents and the kids?

FEINBERG

Absolutely. That's why we have a 3,500-kid waitlist for students wanting to come to our schools in Houston. They understand the end-goal success.

DEASY

It's the quality of teaching that occurs during that period of time that makes all the difference in the world. Improving the quality of teaching and learning is primary.

MAKING THE CONNECTION: THE BENEFITS OF EDUCATION

SESNO

What role does the federal government play? This is traditionally a local issue. How do we proceed?

KLEIN

I don't think you can say this is a local issue. I think this is a national issue. This is the future of our nation. It's not like Binghamton, New York, is an economy unto itself. Nations solve their employment challenges and their education challenges. We have to define this as a national issue. Nobody would leave global warming to the localities to resolve. We need national leadership. We need a national government that's willing to step up and address the education issue.

DEASY

And that's where the outrage is. In this country, when we have a hurricane approaching the coast—or, God forbid, a blizzard approaching Washington, D.C., in the wintertime—there's huge preparation. Massive amounts of energy go into it, in fact, because we know that lives could be lost, and lives could be ruined.

Where's the same energy when the situation is students who can't read at the end of third grade? Lives can be lost, and lives will be ruined. There's no difference. In fact, incarceration rates, in some cases, beat graduation rates. Trying to understand these consequences has to be at the bully pulpit of the next presidency. And then there will be tremendous opportunity at the local level to act on it. Absent that, it becomes 50 different conversations.

FEINBERG

Right. It's got to be started from the bully pulpit, from the top down.

SESNO

Are the governors key to this?

ROMER

There are two keys. First, I want the next president to use that bully pulpit. I'd like to have him return to the FDR fireside chat. Every Friday evening, the president has a conversation with the families in America on a different topic. And he does it realistically, so they can begin to understand the consequences—for their families' life and their children's lives—if they don't do better. That's one thing. But governors are also key, because the president has got to be president not just to Congress but also of 50 governors. And he's got to have a personal leadership there. This is just too great a crisis.

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epidemic of injuries and deaths in college football games, the NCAA has been considered an educational institution; as such, it has not had to pay taxes.

But Vaccaro and others question just what sort of education student-athletes are receiving. They point to the number of hours they spend practicing their sport (over 44 per week for football players, according to one recent study) as opposed to doing schoolwork and the low rates at which they graduate (of the four teams in the 2008 men's basketball Final Four, North Carolina was the only one that, in recent years, has graduated more than half of its players). "The tax-exempt status is premised on the idea that the NCAA is about educating athletes and making them better persons," says Michael McCann, a visiting sports law professor at Boston College. "And, according to some critics, there's overwhelming evidence that's not occurring."

Vaccaro believes that the NCAA losing its tax-exempt status and being recognized as a business would force the organization and its members to compensate student-athletes beyond providing them with a scholarship that many of them are effectively unable to use. Even if college athletes in revenue-generating sports aren't paid an outright salary—something that Vaccaro favors but recognizes is a long way off—he envisions other forms of compensation. He points to the revenue generated from the sale of the rebroadcast rights of games. "These kids should get residuals every time one of their old games is shown," he says. And he proposes that if a student-athlete uses all of his eligibility at a school, he be given $20,000 as a "going-away present to help him pay for his first apartment." In short, he hopes a no-longer-tax-exempt NCAA would lay bare what he sees as the fundamental hypocrisy of big-time college sports. "Everyone connected to funding the NCAA is business-oriented," he told me. "But the people who are providing the material for the event that people are paying for the right to see or advertise on or be connected to are not treated as a business. How can that be?"

Vaccaro is optimistic that he'll get his congressional hearing. "They said I'm a person of substance," he reported back after a meeting with congressional staffers earlier this year. "We got two hours. No one gets more than thirty minutes." And one congressional aide recently told me that his committee could hold hearings on the NCAA as early as September.

But, even if Vaccaro doesn't manage to get the NCAA stripped of its tax-exempt status, he's pursuing other means to take on the organization. Most notably, he's seeking to end the NBA's "one-and-done" rule, which indirectly benefits the NCAA by forcing high school players who once would have gone straight to the pros to spend at least one year in college. Since the "one-and-done" rule is part of the collective bargaining agreement the league signed with the players' union in 2005 that runs out in 2011, Vaccaro is lobbying the union members to strike a different deal in the next round of negotiations. "The very players who I made multimillionaires with shoe deals and draft position were the same kids who voted against allowing high school kids," Vaccaro says. "I told LeBron and Kobe and Tracy, 'Shame on you, because it was OK for me or others like me to help you get that contract, but you don't want the next group doing it.' And their answer to me was, 'Sonny, the older guys outvoted us.' Well you know what, the older guys are going to be those guys in the next collective bargaining agreement."

In the meantime, Vaccaro is looking for ways to circumvent the "one-and-done" rule. The most promising avenue lies overseas. Two years ago, he was on the verge of brokering a deal for two American high-school stars to play one season for a professional team in Israel, but he scotched the idea because of Israel's conflict with Hezbollah. "The guy from the team was telling me, 'Sonny, the bombs don't come to Jerusalem,' but I couldn't let them go there," Vaccaro recalls. (Both players went to college instead.) Vaccaro is now looking for other young hoops phenoms who'd be interested in playing overseas for the year they'd otherwise be in college before coming back to enter the NBA draft. "I need Jackie Robinson; I need a guy who can stand this," he says. "And I think I'll have one."

Vaccaro has so many brainstorms about how to beat the NCAA that he has trouble keeping his focus. In one conversation, he told me that he had the organization "by the balls" because he was on the verge of launching a basketball academy for hoops phenoms that will obviate the need for them to play in college. A few months later, he told me that he was no longer interested in the academy because now he had the NCAA "by the nuts" on its tax-exempt status. Once, when I asked him about his plan to send players to Europe, he replied, "My quote is, it can never work," before, in the next breath, telling me that he had discovered his Jackie Robinson—a talented high school sophomore with a strong family situation and sufficient smarts that "he'd be able to do it because of his background." At times, I found myself reminding Vaccaro of ideas he had tossed out but evidently forgotten. Still, the mere fact that he's churning through so many ideas should have the NCAA worried. After all, Vaccaro's genius doesn't lie in careful planning or even rationality. His success stems from spur-of-the-moment improvisation—from pitching Nike on a shoe but winding up selling the company on a promotional strategy. "This is how my mind works, this is what I do," he explains. "Everything I did, I didn't know what I was doing until the minute that I did it."

Perhaps the most important quality Vaccaro lends to the movement to reform college sports—other than his insider status—is his energy. In April, he traveled to the University of Memphis to speak at a three-day conference being held by the College Sports Research Institute (CSRI). The academics who study—and advocate for reform in—college sports tend to be a beleaguered bunch, disrespected both by their colleagues (who view their field as modish at best and frivolous at worst) and by their research subjects (who view them as pointy-heads). Indeed, the CSRI itself was on the verge of leaving the University of Memphis for the University of North Carolina because its director feared that it wasn't being taken seriously due to the "nonacademic image" of the school's basketball team. The night before Vaccaro's talk, the speaker delivering the conference's opening address began his remarks with a fictional wire service article about the 2058 CSRI conference whose theme would be "Looking back at 50 years of failed reform of college sports."

Although Vaccaro was once the scourge of the sports-reform movement, he's now a member in good standing. "I've got a whole new line of friends," he boasts, "people who've written dissertations and books." Meanwhile, the coaches who make up Vaccaro's old line of friends are keeping their distance. "Only two or three of them have ever called me and commended me for what I'm trying to do," he says. "I don't think if I ever get to Congress, any of them will be on my right-hand side or my left-hand side saying, 'Give freedom to these kids.'"

But Vaccaro is more like a coach, and less like so many of his new academic (or, as he calls them, "academician") friends, in that he's not yet resigned to defeat. When it was his turn to address the conference, Vaccaro essentially delivered a locker-room talk. "You've got to stand up," he shouted from the well of a massive lecture hall as some of the conference attendees shifted uncomfortably in

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their seats. "You can't damn win by just having a damn meeting and then forgetting about it tomorrow morning. The only way you win is to step out. Step out! What, are you afraid of your presidents? Are you afraid of your athletic directors? Are you afraid of the media? … Why are you afraid of these people?" Vaccaro didn't just question his new friends' courage; he questioned their commitment and even blamed them for the problem they wanted to fix. "You people let it happen because you people are the ones who are conscious that there's something wrong. There's nothing wrong. The only thing wrong is you don't fight. You're satisfied. You're as bad as they are. You know what? I know who they are. I don't know who you are. … This happened right in front of your eyes. C'mon people! I mentioned all the accolades and the honors you've got, the degrees you have. You've got doctorates for everything from your toenails to your mind. Then do something with it!"

Vaccaro calls his crusade against the NCAA a "mom-and-pop" operation, and he means it literally. He runs it with his wife and business partner, Pam, from their home in a gated community in Calabasas, California, just north of Malibu. Vaccaro's office is decorated with mementos from his 40 years in the business of basketball: the pair of sneakers Michael Jordan wore on the night he won one of his NBA championships; a Dick Vitale bobblehead doll; glossy color photos of himself with seemingly every major basketball star of the last few decades. But just behind Vaccaro's desk hang some more recent additions to his wall of fame: arty black-and-white pictures of Roberto Clemente, Muhammad Ali, and Jesse Owens. They were gifts from Pam who gave them to him, he explained when I visited him at his home not long ago, "because they all stood for a cause."

Vaccaro's cause is, in part, about leaving a legacy larger than that of a sneaker pimp. "I've got a nice life," he told me as he sat on a couch in his office, attired in his customary sweatsuit and slippers. "I'm sixty-eight, I've got a beautiful wife, I've got good friends. No one's paying me now. But that's the beauty of it, because what are they going to say now? I'm not trying to sell Nike shoes now." But his bigger cause is the players. "Everything I have, they gave me," he said, "all these kids." As he told the academics in Memphis, "On a personal level, I owe it to them, you don't."

Vaccaro has four children from a previous marriage, but he left them and their mother when he moved from Pittsburgh to Las Vegas. "I was more a wandering person than I was a family person," he says. He and Pam have no children, but it doesn't take Freud to recognize that they view the kids who've gone to their camps and played in their tournaments and worn their shoes as their own. The pool in the Vaccaros' backyard isn't for Sonny or Pam (neither swims) but for the basketball players who visit. "It's so neat to see the city kids get a chance to get in the water," Pam told me. Even kids who don't play basketball interest Vaccaro. When he goes to universities, he gives out his unlisted phone number to any student who approaches him with a question about breaking into the industry. I actually benefited from Vaccaro's kindness myself when, as a 17-year-old whose basketball ambitions had topped out at the JV level but who had dreams of being a writer, I penned a letter to Vaccaro asking if I could cover his ABCD camp for my high school paper. He wrote back and offered me total access to the entire week-long camp. "Take Care And Always Be Fair," he signed the letter, "Sonny."

Of course, Vaccaro has a somewhat reductionist view of parenting—and of life. "Other than your health, the only thing that differentiates ourselves from anyone is the capitalistic game, the ability to earn money," he told me, "because money dictates the way the world is." Which is why Vaccaro has been so unsentimental about the advice he's offered to all of the young players he's counseled over the years: to make money off their talents as soon as they can. Even the players he advised to turn pro before they were ready and whose careers bottomed out, he insists, didn't make a mistake. "The worst thing that could happen here, you're going to have about twelve million dollars in the bank before they find out you can't play," Vaccaro says. "You can't logically sit here and tell me, the people that I was talking to, that they could have expected to earn, legally, ten to twelve million dollars in their lifetimes."

Vaccaro's take-the-money-and-run attitude has made him privy to many, if not most, of college basketball's dirty secrets. Perhaps more than any person in the sport, he knows which players get paid how much and by whom, which players go to class, and which players are functionally illiterate. Indeed, the surest way Vaccaro could bring down the NCAA would be for him to reveal what he knows. But it's a step he refuses to take. "The story will be the kid can't read or write. It won't be that the university perpetuated the myth that he was a student," he says. "The kid'll get screwed."

But just because Vaccaro won't say what he knows publicly doesn't mean he isn't pained by it privately. In fact, Vaccaro is no longer even much of a basketball fan. Once upon a time, he watched all the games and traveled with the teams whose coaches and players he was particularly close to. Sometimes, he'd retreat to the bathroom if the game was tight to throw up and flush the toilets to drown out the noise from the crowd. These days, Vaccaro hardly watches any games at all. On the night I visited him, the NCAA tournament was going on and my favorite team, the University of North Carolina, was playing. I'd just assumed that I'd watch the game with Vaccaro during my visit. But he refused. The game he once loved now almost disgusted him. "No one gives a shit when the nine o'clock game starts how these kids got on the court," he told me. "They just care who wins or loses." As he complained to the academics in Memphis, "I'm tired of my good friend Dickie V. telling me about Diaper Dandies. I'm tired of everyone telling me about the Chrysler player of the day twenty-five times. I'm tired of it. They just keep selling these kids and their achievements, minute after minute, day after day, month after month, year after year."

And, yet, Vaccaro can't totally separate himself. Indeed, he intends to spend his last days enmeshed in the game so that he can change it. "You ever see *The Outlaw Josey Wales*?" he asked as we spoke in his office. While I itched to find out the score of the Carolina game, he began to reenact the scene in which a bounty hunter, after initially agreeing to stop his pursuit of Wales in exchange for his life, changes his mind and returns to try to capture Wales. "Here's the line," Vaccaro said, as he stood in the center of his office, bouncing up and down on his toes. "He looks at Josey and he says, 'I had to come back.' And then they draw and Josey kills him." He seemed momentarily deflated, as if he realized he was analogizing himself to a dead man. But he continued. "The point is, I had to do this," he said. "I've lived that life. I've chased these people, I've been belittled and berated for forty-five years, and that's fine, because I ended up OK. But I'm saying to you, I had to come back, I had to do this. I have to do it." ◆

ANTHONY RUSSO

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You deserve a factual look at . . .

Rockets Over Sderot

What should Israel do to stop this outrage?

Three years ago, Israel abandoned the Gaza strip and evicted the over 8,000 Jewish residents who had lived there for generations and who had created an island of civility, industry and prosperity. What has been Israel's reward for its generosity?

What are the facts?

Israel's many mistakes. In its six decades of history, clouded by almost uninterrupted warfare against it, Israel has made many mistakes. Relinquishing the Sinai to Egypt, Southern Lebanon to Hezbollah, and Gaza to the Palestinians were the most egregious. One lesson to be learned was that one cannot make peace with one's enemies by giving away pieces of one's country.

The greatest folly, of course, was the abandonment of Gaza. Virtually since the first day of Israel's disengagement from the area, the Gazans have launched daily rocket attacks on the city of Sderot. So far "only" about twenty Israelis have been killed. Many more have been wounded.

But it is only a matter of time that one of these rockets is going to hit a school, a hospital or an apartment building, causing unacceptable casualties. Then Israel's forbearance and patience are likely to snap.

These Qassam rockets, however, are only the beginning. Large quantities of explosives and more advanced weapons systems – presents from Syria and mostly from Iran – are supplied daily through sophisticated tunnels from the Sinai into the Gaza territory. That happens under the "watchful eyes" of the Egyptians, who have foolishly been allowed to be the guardians of the border between Egypt and Gaza.

There is no question what any other country would do if it found itself in a position similar to that of Israel. What would we do if bombs or rockets launched from Mexico landed in San Diego? Obviously, we would obliterate the source of such attack and inflict sufficient additional damage to totally discourage such behavior in the future. But what does Israel do? Does it use its powerful army or its superb air force to destroy the areas from which these rockets are launched? Surprisingly not. Guided by its own moral compass and always concerned about "world opinion," Israel attempts to pinpoint the source of attacks, taking enormous care not to hurt "innocent civilians." But the concept of "innocent civilians" is nonsense, of course. Anybody who allows his backyard to be used as a launching pad for rockets should expect his home to become a target for counterattack and for casualties to ensue.

Lessons to be learned. For reasons that are not at all clear, Israel finds itself in the thankless role of being responsible for Gaza's welfare, adequate supply of food, fuel and electricity. Occasionally, in feeble retaliation, Israel will slow the supply of fuel and electricity, though it never curtails the supply of food and medicine and routinely allows seriously ill Gazans access to its superb medical facilities. When it occasionally does curtail fuel and electricity, the world complains about Israel's "siege of Gaza."

> "...the bitter experience with Gaza will make Israel quite unresponsive to our government's desire to achieve a 'two-state final solution'..."

Some questions: 1) Who appointed Israel to be the guardian of Gaza and responsible for its welfare and comfort? 2) Why don't the Gazans and their Iranian and Syrian friends use the sophisticated tunnels leading from Sinai to Gaza to import fuel, food, and medicine instead of explosives and weapons? 3) Why, in sixty years and in the decades before, when Egypt was in charge of Gaza, have the Palestinians been unable to build a functioning power plant that would make them independent in that respect? Surely their Arab cousins, could supply some of their abundant petroleum for that purpose.

Israel's attempt to stop the shelling of Sderot has so far been a failure. But what *should* Israel do? The answer is obvious: Israel should openly declare to Gaza and to the world at large that every rocket that falls on Sderot or on any place in Israel will immediately be responded to by a rocket aimed at where it came from. Since Gaza is packed with humanity, it is clear that such a tit-for-tat approach would cause many civilian casualties. That would be a tragedy, of course. But, it is pretty clear that the rockets would stop in short order. Sure, "the world" would object. But a country's first duty is to protect its citizens from attack. That is what *we* would do. That is the very least any country would do.

The real tragedy is that the bitter experience with Gaza will make Israel quite unresponsive to our government's desire to achieve a "two-state final solution" before the end of the year. No such solution is possible in this or in any other year unless Israelis are convinced that the Palestinians wish to live in peace and friendship with them. If, under the pressure of our government and of many other countries, Israel would commit the folly of giving up control of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank"), not only the Palestinians, but also Syrians and Iranians – with heavy armament, planes and tanks – would pour in and would dominate the Judean ridges and the heartland of Israel. That would finally achieve the long-hoped-for end of the Jewish state. It would bring about what many wars and "intifidas" were unable to accomplish.

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

MATTERS OF FACT

In 1964 Christopher Isherwood published *A Single Man*, a novel about a homosexual man and his state of spirit after his lover dies. Now comes *Chris & Don*, a documentary film about Isherwood's lover and his state of spirit since Chris's death. The subtitle of the film is "A Love Story." The picture makes the worn term fresh, moving.

The principal place is the couple's home in Santa Monica, where Don Bachardy still lives. They met in 1953, when Chris was forty-nine and Don was eighteen. Isherwood was already a celebrated writer; Don was a good-looking youth, intelligent and vital but just a youth. Isherwood's diaries, quoted in the voice-over, detail what we would know anyway. He was smitten: so deeply that, far from any embarrassment about homosexuality (a condition he had long since superseded), the age difference did not deter him. Don's response was unworried and full. The pair began to live together, and, allowing for a few separations through the years due to Chris's teaching jobs, allowing too for a few sidebar affairs by both, they remained together until Chris's death in 1986. In effect, which is much of the film's point, Don still lives with Chris.

Chris is literally there, too—quite a lot. Footage of him comes from a BBC television interview that was done with him in the 1970s, as well as from home videos. We see and hear Chris in settings ranging from his workroom to a gondola in Venice, often with Don and such acquaintances as Truman Capote, Tennessee Williams, Somerset Maugham, and E. M. Forster. One regret is that the directors, Guido Santi and Tina Mascara, whose work is otherwise true and tender, have had a few scenes from Chris's diaries re-enacted, in long shot, by others. Well, there is one other regret. Though the picture offers a colorful, attractive portrait of Chris the man, it insufficiently celebrates his distinction as a writer. This is the man who early in his life collaborated with Auden (who had been a school chum) on three plays, startling works at the time. Chris went on to write, after some years in pre-Hitler Berlin, *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* and *Goodbye to Berlin*. (Stories in the latter were the basis of the play *I Am a Camera* and the musical *Cabaret*.) He and Auden came to America in 1939. Auden stayed in New York; Chris moved to California, and added screenwriting to his range.

ANTHONY RUSSO

Books continued to come from him during his California years, but he also worked on or solely wrote a number of screenplays. He is quoted here as saying that he improved as a writer through screen work, learned how to make structures more compact and to strengthen his dialogue. Nonetheless his scripts were not remotely as good as his other work. The only film of his that I remember pleasantly is his adaptation with Terry Southern of Waugh's *The Loved One*; the only one mentioned in this film is *Frankenstein: The True Story*, which he co-wrote with Don and which was produced for television.

Chris's most notable work related to film, however, was not a screenplay and was set in England. In 1945 he published *Prater Violet*, a short novel based on his early screenwriting experience in London. It stands with Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon* in the front rank of fiction about film. Also, through these years he became immersed in Vedanta Hinduism, which resulted in translations and his book *My Guru and His Disciple*.

It is this man, humorously dignified, spiritually avid, aesthetically fine—even more of the last than the film affords us—who moves through *Chris & Don* and who is still present in the being of Don Bachardy. Chris's influence on him is marked immediately when we meet Don because this California-born man has a considerable English accent and uses English locutions. Now white-haired yet still very vigorous, Don, who is an artist, keeps on with his painting, at which he is strikingly if narrowly gifted. He only does portraits and naturally has done hundreds of Chris. He did many of them, including nudes, during what they both knew were the last months of Chris's life. The work in those last months seems an enormous bouquet of gratitude, for it was Chris who spotted the young man's talent early on and sent him to art school.

Indeed, gratitude is a signet of Don's character throughout this film—to Chris for all the material advantages, but, most affectingly, for the chance to have lived his life with Chris. Don Bachardy is still in love, there in their house.

CHRIS & DON: A LOVE STORY
Zeitgeist

MY WINNIPEG
IFC

19TH ANNUAL HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH FILM FESTIVAL

Those who know something of Guy Maddin's reputation will not be surprised by the title of his latest film. We can foretell that *My Winnipeg* will not be just a slog through somebody's memories of his birthplace. Much to the contrary: Maddin is interested in what remembering actually is, at least as much as in what memory brings back. He is also ferociously—almost fiendishly—concerned to explore,

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revise, enjoy the artistic medium of his life: film.

The first shot of the picture is of a lovely elderly woman, rehearsing her lines with an unseen director. She is in fact an actress, but throughout the film she plays Maddin's mother in all the varied (sometimes frank) flashbacks. In this opening scene Maddin (whose voice we hear throughout) coaches his "mother." Oddly, this scene, which runs about a minute, is one of the longest segments in the film.

We then plunge into a fireworks display of bits of Maddin's childhood and youth and early manhood, drawn from home movies or from re-enactments with actors. This is not disturbing, as it is in *Chris & Don*, because the individuals are less well-known. Mixed into this mélange are glimpses of Winnipeg, of past footage about Winnipeg, of hockey greats whom Maddin worshipped as a boy. (He even gets some of them, now elderly, to don uniforms and pretend to play.) These brief shots are frequently interrupted by large title cards—"Force!" "Heroes!" Segments are often briefly separated by patches of black with slivers of light in them.

Soon we are aware that, even more than what we are seeing, we are interested in the way it is all shown to us. The history of Winnipeg and its importance to a native are no more engrossing in themselves than those matters would be in a hundred other places. But to analyze Maddin's film in such terms would be like analyzing separately each component of a graphic artist's collage. *My Winnipeg* is a mobile collage, and its assemblage is fascinating. Winnipeg in itself is relevant only in that it is the spot that Maddin came from and treasures—and criticizes. It could have been Kansas City or Buffalo.

Hot and immediate as *My Winnipeg* is, it is nevertheless a link with the film past. In the last century, which was the first century of film, many film-makers—directors is not the exact word—were mostly interested in exploring the medium, finding out what film could do uniquely, rather than assuming that its whole function was to extend the drama and the novel. People such as Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage, Gregory Markopoulos, Jordan Belson, and dozens of others—some of whom made their works by scratching on film stock—were searching for possibilities that were not confined to actors and recognizable stories.

With retrospective insight, we can see that these activities were predictable. The film medium is so powerful, so various, so packed with possible wonders, it was inevitable that when it fell into the hands of the generations after D. W. Griffith (who came from the theater), some of them did not want to keep on the same path. Nowadays, however, the latest generation of film-makers seems to be at least as interested in the crannies of human nature as in the nooks of cinematic adventure.

Maddin is a kind of blend. He combines filmic bravura with warm human concerns. Those concerns begin and continue with the narration that he wrote and speaks, which makes us feel that we have been admitted to a privacy in his head—less stream of consciousness than stream of the unconscious.

Once again spring brings good news about bad news. Here is the nineteenth annual Human Rights Watch International Film Festival, comprising nineteen features and thirteen shorts from twenty countries. Each of these pictures is concerned with social malfeasance. Each of them reassures us that, whatever current film fashions are, there are still people around the globe who use film to stoke our hunger for justice. I have seen two of the features, which coincidentally have a thematic link, and they are easily up to the level of my experience with the past eighteen festivals.

Letter to Anna is a documentary about Anna Politkovskaya, the Russian journalist, by Eric Bergkraut, a Swiss who knew her. She was acutely critical of the Putin government and was murdered in October 2006—shot in the elevator of her Moscow apartment house. Only a short time earlier, she had escaped death by poisoning on a flight somewhere, an attempt that had not deterred her. We see much of Anna herself (as was the case with Isherwood) because of earlier television appearances. She is completely taking, a woman in her fifties, attractive, sharp, companionable, unheroic but determined. The film moves swiftly, with just enough interviewing of friends and daughter to make Anna someone we wish we had known. Her killer, of course, has not been found. But her friends have no doubt about who was responsible.

The Sari Soldiers, by Julie Bridgham of New York, follows the lives of six women in Nepal and their involvement, on different sides, in the ten-year civil war in their country. Intimate and engrossing, the film gives us six commitments and hopes. Especially considering the conditions of work, the cinematography (most of it by Bridgham) is excellent. One of the six is a fervent Maoist. Her tenacious beliefs are especially notable after seeing the film about a woman who apparently was murdered by a (formerly) communist government. This Nepalese woman proves yet again that, for desperate people, communism often seems the only organized rational program that can help them.

An abridged version of the festival will visit forty U.S. cities. The filmgoers in those cities are lucky. ◆

Jed Perl on Art

MAO CRAZY

There are times when art should be the last thing on an art critic's mind. The thunderous popularity of a number of contemporary Chinese artists compels a political analysis. Much of the work is powered by a startling and completely delusionary infatuation with Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution. This is more sinister than anything we have seen in the already fairly astonishing annals of radical chic. We are witnessing a globalized political whitewash job, with artists and assorted collectors, dealers, and sycophants pouring a thick layer of avant-garde double-talk over the infernal decade of suffering, destruction, and death that Mao unleashed on his country in 1966. And as we are also dealing with the house of mirrors that is the art world, I have no doubt that somebody is ready to explain that I am confusing appropriation with approbation or that fascism is just another way of spelling freedom. I must say, the theory people have a lot to answer for. But here is the bottom line: the global art world's burgeoning love affair with Mao and the Cultural Revolution makes a very neat fit with the current Chinese regime's efforts to sell itself as the authoritarian power that everybody can learn to love.

CAI GUO-QIANG: I WANT TO BELIEVE
Guggenheim Museum

THE REVOLUTION CONTINUES: NEW ART FROM CHINA
(Rizzoli)

A few weeks ago it was reported that Christie's International, in the run-up to the Summer Olympics, was privately

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offering for sale in Hong Kong one of the largest of Andy Warhol's portraits of Chairman Mao, with an asking price of $120 million. It is only natural that Warhol would figure somewhere in this sordid scene. It was in 1972 that he began painting portraits of Mao. The date is significant. By then the American left's infatuation with Mao and his Little Red Book was cooling, as the realities of the Cultural Revolution began to sink in. And it was then that Nixon went to China, thereby inaugurating what would become a dramatic reversal in Mao's reputation among the American mainstream. So Warhol's *Mao*s, although they riffed on the chairman's status for the more demented parts of the American left, were unleashed on the world precisely as Nixon, in the extraordinarily important opening to China, was also for all intents and purposes sanitizing Mao. Thus Warhol set the pattern for the new Chinese art, with its nauseating mix of romantic authoritarianism, ironic leftism, and capitalist realpolitik.

If you have any doubts, take a look at Zhang Hongtu's *Long Live Chairman Mao Series #29*, a Quaker Oats container on which Zhang has fiddled with a bit of acrylic paint, transforming the old Quaker gent into the chairman. It's an American-supermarket-meets-Cultural-Revolution moment, suggesting that all marketing is equal, Andy's and Mao's. Zhang's Quaker Oats container is included in the collection of the Saatchi Gallery in London. I have studied the catalogue of this collection, *The Revolution Continues: New Art from China*, and I am pretty confident that it is the most hateful art book published in my lifetime. For the revolution that is continuing is none other than the Cultural Revolution. And if you were in danger of missing the point, the binding of the book, at least in the version published by Rizzoli in the United States, is emblazoned front and back with a photograph of hundreds of Red Guard members in Tiananmen Square in 1966, holding up their Little Red Books.

In the introduction to this extraordinary volume we are informed that contemporary Chinese art "can be understood as an extension of Mao's legacy of rebellion." I do not know anything about the person who wrote these words, one Jiang Jiehong, who is said to be the director of the Center for Chinese Visual Arts at the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design. It does not matter. This is radical chic with blood on its hands. Let us not forget that, by the best estimates, at least half a million people perished amid the upheavals of the first three years of the Cultural Revolution.

And let us also not forget that this grotesque book appears under the auspices of Charles Saatchi, the wealthy art collector who, in an earlier incarnation as an advertising wizard, brought Margaret Thatcher and the Conservatives to victory in England with the slogan "Labour Isn't Working." Well, in China the workers never stopped working. One almost doesn't know where to begin, but I am reminded of a recent remark by an architect named Mouzhan Majidi, who worked with Norman Foster on the construction of the new Terminal 3 at Beijing Capital International Airport. Majidi was glad to explain to *The New York Times* how much easier it is to build in China than in England, where there are so many rules and regulations and labor unions. "It evoked what it might have been like to build the pyramids," he commented. The pyramids? They were built by slaves.

Anyway, he might not have said this if he had been speaking a few weeks later, after shoddy construction led to the collapse of some seven thousand classrooms as a result of the earthquake in Sichuan province. But of course the standards used to build schools in a remote province cannot be anything like those used for Beijing's Terminal 3, a project designed to project a new hipper-than-thou authoritarianism, which will be further reinforced during the Olympics

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by the displays of work by the new Chinese artists.

While it might be an exaggeration to say that every Chinese artist who has gained an international reputation in recent years has a thing for Mao and the Cultural Revolution, the obsession is hard to avoid. Zhang Huan, the subject of a huge show at PaceWildenstein's two spaces in Chelsea, derives most of his photorealist paintings from photographs taken during what he calls "the time of Mao." And although Zhang explains that Mao's values are not his own, he characterizes Mao's viewpoint as "in essence … idealistic—not mine but never the less idealistic." Getting comfortable with Mao is a frequent theme in contemporary Chinese art. In the Saatchi catalogue, photographs of China during the Cultural Revolution are juxtaposed with the work of contemporary artists, as if all images were equal, and all of them just images. In a sequence of two double-page spreads, the photograph of Tiananmen Square awash in red banners and Little Red Books that is on the book's cover is followed by a red-on-red room-sized installation by Cai Guo-Qiang, whose retrospective recently closed at the Guggenheim in New York. If this juxtaposition suggests that fascism is just another incarnation of formalism, what are we to make of the observation by Britta Erickson, a curator in the catalogue of a show mounted last year at Denmark's Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, that in the mid-1980s some Chinese artists, "reprising the Red Guards' antiauthoritarian stance to art, sought to bring down the institution of art itself through Dadaist strategies"? In what sense, pray tell, was the Red Guard anti-authoritarian?

Cai's fondness for the new Red Guard chic is nothing short of obscene. Here is part of what he has to say in the catalogue of the Guggenheim show, which is called "I Want to Believe": "To us, Mao Zedong is the most influential person in the latter half of the twentieth century. He is the idol, God-like. His artistic talent, calligraphy, poetry, military strategies, philosophy, essays, and revolution[ary] movements deeply influenced my generation, despite the fact that later on we all started to question his ideologies." Alexandra Munroe, who quotes this statement in her catalogue essay, goes on to explain that "the argument that certain of [Cai's] strategies—in addition to iconography—are derived from his idealized memory of Maoist revolutionary culture is both persuasive and illuminating. Mao's slogan 'No construction, no destruction' … is central to Cai's practice, for example. Revolution, transformation, and idealism are born from radical elimination, and the foundation of new culture must lie in the demolition or reconfiguration of the past."

This man, who apparently associates artistic innovation with totalitarian atrocities, was more or less given the run of the Guggenheim Museum in New York. His work attracted large crowds. So it is important to recall that the Guggenheim was originally founded in large part to celebrate the art of Kandinsky, who during his life was displaced by not one but two totalitarian regimes, first the Russians, then the Germans. Kandinsky died in exile in France in 1944. Cai, who lives in New York City, will be the most prominent artist at the Beijing Olympics. His retrospective is going to be up at the National Art Museum, and he is collaborating with Fireworks by Grucci on a pyrotechnic display for the opening celebrations.

One of the works on display at the Guggenheim was Cai's *Rent Collection Courtyard, 1965*. This is a reconstruction of a piece of Maoist propaganda, a group of 114 life-size clay sculptures, bland naturalist figures, which are said to represent the misery of peasant life in prerevolutionary China. In the Guggenheim catalogue we are told that "for a decade, it was reproduced and erected in cities throughout China, where it was the most emotionally charged and ubiquitous political image after Mao's portrait." In 1999, Cai was invited by the director of the Venice Biennale to reconstruct *Rent Collection Courtyard*. Now, you might suppose that resurrecting Maoist propaganda at the Venice Biennale would be an act of ironic appropriation, rather like Duchamp's idea of relocating a urinal in an art gallery. But it turns out that Cai was aiming to teach the West a lesson. By showcasing the deep feelings lodged in Maoist agitprop, he meant to improve us. Munroe dutifully explains that the point of "showing a socialist-realist work of such emotional power was to subvert contemporary Western notions of art by revealing its own stylistic constraints and fundamental *lack* of creative freedom." In other words, let's get over this decadent European infatuation with formalism and abstraction (although Cai himself has done lots of non-representational stuff and is best known for his use of gunpowder and gunpowder residues in performances and paintings).

Zhang Xiaogang, *Big Family,* 1995

"I do not know," Cai said, "whether it is the artists of the Cultural Revolution or us who hold the strongest attachment to art, but the people of that time believed in a new society and an ideal for mankind." Those are the staples of Stalinist double-talk. Perhaps you still remember them. The bourgeois West does not know the real value of art. Only communal art, proletarian art, the people's art, is real art. And so on. "Today we regularly hold biennales and the like," Cai asks, "but why do we do this?" It is a question he ought to have no trouble answering, as

COURTESY RIZZOLI

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his career is based on his success in these venues. Perhaps it is his close study of the mass mentality of Maoist China that has enabled Cai to seduce the mass audience that visits today's tonier museums. These artists have pulled off a feat unprecedented in modern history: they have figured out a way to be communist fellow travelers and capitalist fellow travelers at the same time.

The Venice Biennale has played a significant role in the reception of the new Chinese art; think of it as Marco Polo in reverse. It was at the Biennale in 1995 that Zhang Xiaogang had his big breakthrough in the West, with *Bloodline: The Big Family, No. 3.* Works by Zhang, whose portraits of Maoist-era families sold for a total of $56.8 million at auction last year, are emblazoned on the covers of the Saatchi Gallery and the Louisiana Museum catalogues. The figures in Zhang's paintings, rendered in the airbrush-smooth technique of a magazine illustrator, stare straight out at the viewer. They have blank, mask-like faces, and wear the monochromatic clothes that were regulation garb in the 1960s. The most salient features of Zhang's androids are their eyes, which are huge and dark and opaque, each illumined by a dash of white paint. For anybody who is old enough to remember, Zhang's portraits immediately bring to mind the assorted waifs done by the San Francisco artist Margaret Keane in the 1960s, which were nicknamed "Sad Eyes" and "Big Eyes." Keane's paintings—promoted at the time as being by her husband, Walter—became a joke among the Bay Area intellectuals, although I do remember a few people with really advanced taste who said that Keane's work was so bad that it was good. Zhang's work is so bad that it sells for millions of dollars. His paintings are said to reflect the tensions of the Cultural Revolution, when children were known to turn their parents in to the authorities. In the Louisiana catalogue, this schlock is described as showing people "isolated in their own emotional universes" or shaped by, "mysterious, unknowable forces." The only mysterious force from which Zhang is isolated is the art of painting.

To anybody familiar with developments in art in the past quarter-century, the new Chinese stuff has a déjà-vu-all-over-again quality. Zhan Wang makes scholar's rocks out of stainless steel, in much the way that Jeff Koons and Sherrie Levine recast objects in unexpected materials. The impact of Anselm Kiefer can be felt on many of these artists, not only on the deep perspectives in a painting by Zhang Xiaotao and on Zhang Huan's collages with carved and photographed elements, but also on the heterogeneity of a career like Cai's, which moved from performance art to painting. Zhang Dali's *Chinese Offspring*, life-size cast figures hanging from a ceiling, suggest Bruce Nauman's cast animals. Yu Hong's simpering painterly figuration relates to Elizabeth Peyton. There are shades of Marlene Dumas's nightmarish ambiguities in Yang Shaobin's work. Zhang Huan's black-and-white renderings of photographs (although done in ash, a medium he regards as quintessentially Chinese) are retreads of Gerhard Richter's black-and-white photo-realist compositions. And Shi Xinning is the Mark Tansey of Chinese art, doing renderings of historic moments in the lives of the Queen Mother or FDR, only with Mao popping up in a starring role. The multimedia, jack-of-all-trades look of the big shows we have seen in New York, whether by Cai or Zhang Huan, is indebted to a funhouse exhibition style that has been embraced by Matthew Barney and Paul McCarthy and other Americans.

That these Chinese artists, many of whom were born in the 1950s and 1960s, have turned for their models to Europe and the United States is perhaps inevitable, given that during the Cultural Revolution the art academies in China were closed, and only the most restricted forms of socialist realist expression were permitted. As far as earlier Chinese art is concerned, there was almost nothing to see, since Chiang Kai-shek hauled the finest classical work off to Taiwan and the mayhem of the Red Guard did away with a good deal of what remained. The power of totalitarian regimes to wipe out a visual arts culture generally exceeds their ability to obliterate a literary culture, and it is by no means clear that such traditions can be revived. Recall that in Russia at the start of the twentieth century the visual arts were flourishing as never before, with Kandinsky, Malevich, Chagall, and many others at the beginnings of extraordinary careers. Lenin and Stalin put an end to all that, and it has never come back. This is not to say that there is nothing of value going on in China today: I do not know all there is to know about art in China. What I do know is that the work that is being promoted around the world as the cutting edge of new Chinese art is overblown and meretricious.

So what is going on here? To answer this question, we need to go back to Warhol, who first made Mao a hot topic in contemporary Western art. What precisely Warhol had in mind when he painted the chairman is difficult to say, since Warhol was never anything but tongue-in-cheek. In the catalogue (there is a Mao portrait on the cover) of an enormous show of Warhol's late work, mounted by Larry Gagosian in 2006 and called "Cast a Cold Eye," Vincent Fremont, one of the inner circle at the Factory in the 1970s, recalls the beginnings of Andy's *Mao*s. "The original idea," he explains, "was to paint a portrait of someone who was a global icon and major influence on people's lives. Andy chose Mao because in China alone a billion people gazed upon his face. Andy used the most common image of the Chairman, the frontispiece from the Little Red Book. The resulting *Mao* series was the most important group of paintings since *Elvis*, *Marilyn*, and *Liz*."

The way Fremont tells the story, Mao is Marilyn, only more so. The terms "icon" and "global icon" are nowadays tossed around with slapdash glee, so it is important to make a basic distinction. It was the moviegoing public that made Marilyn Monroe an icon, because they responded to her beauty, her charm, her wit. The people who hang posters of Marilyn on their walls do so because they like her. It's that simple. But the omnipresence of Mao's image has an altogether different origin. While Leftists in the United States in the late 1960s may have gladly chosen to hang Mao's portrait on their walls, among the billion Chinese who were sure to have his portrait in their homes and in their workplaces, it was understood that they would have endangered their own safety if they did not put his portrait where Mao wanted it to be. There is a world of difference between an icon freely chosen and an icon imposed from above, and the difference has more than a little to do with the difference between a liberal society and an authoritarian society. Warhol's way of blurring this distinction leads straight to the political pornography that characterizes so much of the new Chinese art.

The distinction was not lost on Warhol. According to one of the umpteen books on him that has appeared in recent years, Warhol "often stated that his goal was to obtain the patronage of a dictator, who would then mandate that Warhol's portrait be placed in every governmental office, school, and so on, ensuring the artist unlimited financial opportunities." Was Warhol kidding when he fantasized about being a dictator's court painter? To some degree, of course, he must have been. But then again the fascination of Warhol's work was based on a confusion or conflation of a number of different kinds of power, beginning with the power of celebrity and the power of advertising and

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the power of art. In the early 1970s he added to that incendiary but still somewhat benign mix another element: the power of communist propaganda. That was the point at which his work turned foul. Warhol's *Mao*s—as well as the *Hammer and Sickle* still lifes from later in the 1970s and the Lenin portraits of the 1980s—bring his own mercenary spin to a Western love affair with the certitudes of absolutist politics that dates back to the 1920s and 1930s. That was when some members of the European and American intelligentsia decided that the bombastic images of healthy working men and women coming first out of Russia and then out of Nazi Germany offered a relief from the intricacies of modern art. After all, there is nothing less intricate than a painting by Andy Warhol.

The impact that totalitarian imagery can have on free people is an enduring problem. Susan Sontag's essay on the subject, "Fascinating Fascism," was published two years after Warhol began to paint Mao. She could just as well have been thinking of Warhol's *Mao*s, and more generally of the leftist infatuation with the iconography of the Cultural Revolution, when she remarked that the sophisticated public was beginning "to look at Nazi art with knowing and sniggering detachment, as a form of Pop Art." Sontag, who never liked to get too far ahead of her audience, was aware that her readership had still not quite outlived its infatuation with the Maoist look. But she made an important point when she observed that there is a difference between appreciating the peculiar power of a certain kind of totalitarian imagery and going right ahead and succumbing to that power.

There is a conundrum here. And it is the subject of a brilliant little book by Saul Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death*, which appeared in 1982. "Attention," Friedländer wrote, "has gradually shifted from the reevocation of Nazism as such, from the horror and the pain—even if muted by time and transformed into subdued grief and endless meditation—to voluptuous anguish and ravishing images, images one would like to see going on forever. . . . In the midst of meditation rises a suspicion of complacency. Some kind of limit has been overstepped and uneasiness appears." There is a point, Friedländer is telling us, at which contemplation drifts into romanticization and even obfuscation.

I think this rather neatly describes the allure of Zhang Xiaogang's paintings of families in the grip of the Cultural Revolution. Zhang has transformed the horror of their lives into greeting-card kitsch. He has reduced historic catastrophe to those big, black, cartoonish, deer-caught-in-the-headlights eyes.

By aestheticizing historic catastrophe, the art world's unholy synthesis of Maoism and kitsch enables people to blur their own memories. Perhaps this is why the work has such a mighty appeal among Asian collectors, some of whom are surely as intimately acquainted with the worst calamities of the Maoist years as many Jews are with the horrors of the Final Solution. At a time when fewer and fewer people want to confront the dark side of China's authoritarian version of Western-style capitalism, it probably comes as a relief to find artists who are drawing a curtain across the uglier aspects of a regime whose lineage goes straight back to Mao. If there is something new about the new Chinese art, it is the extent to which the old modernist fascination with irony and ambiguity has become a way of spreading disinformation about Mao and his legacy. In Wang Guangyi's *Great Criticism: Coca-Cola* series, Maoist youth share space with the logo for the world's most popular soft drink, and the result is a kind of apolitical political message art.

Contemporary art, especially of the neo-Maoist variety that I am describing, makes the Chinese government look rather alluring. It is no wonder that the list of art events timed to the Olympics is long. There is the Beijing International Art Biennale. There is an exhibition at the new Ullens Center for Contemporary Art that includes many of the best-known figures on the international scene. The PaceWildenstein Gallery is opening a space in Beijing in August. And on display at Beijing's Galerie Urs Meile until late August is a work by Li Zhangyang that brings together statues of Chairman Mao and Joseph Beuys, the dominant German avant-gardist of the post–World War II period. I have not seen this work, but it has been reported in the art press that "a seated Mao Zedong [is] beholding a future pointed out by Joseph Beuys, who crouches at his side with right hand raised in a gesture usually associated with the Chairman himself."

The central figure in this new age of disinformation may well be Yue Minjun. Yue paints figures that cartoonishly mimic what we are told is his own laughing face, and the only unambiguous thing about his best-known painting, *Execution*, is the price it fetched last year at Sotheby's: $5.9 million. *Execution*—with a composition very loosely based on Goya's *The Third of May, 1808*—represents a mock firing squad, with executioners who are not in fact holding guns and victims who are in their underpants, convulsed with laughter. *Execution* is almost invariably said to have something to do with the crackdown at Tiananmen Square in 1989. But Yue is evasive. "The viewer should not link this painting to Tiananmen," Yue explained in an interview with CNN. Then he hastened to add that "Tiananmen is the catalyst."

Huh? Whatever Yue may be, he is certainly a master of double-talk. And his paintings are a visual equivalent of double-talk. Who knows what *Execution* is about? The men standing before the mock firing squad are treated as such impersonal caricatures that I am left with the suspicion that Yue is victimizing the victims. Or perhaps not. Yue told CNN that in his work he aims to "express my confusion over what I see." Isn't what Yue describes as his "confusion" just an artsy way of saying that all is right with the world? When *Execution* was bought in Hong Kong in the late 1990s by a young stockbroker named Trevor Simon, the subject was so incendiary that the painting had to be hidden in a London warehouse so as to protect Yue, who lives in China. Now Yue's work is widely exhibited in his homeland. What a difference a decade of international trade can make. "He's no longer repressed by China," Simon explained. "And I'm no longer repressed by commercial ambition." Freedom, it turns out, is just another word for multimillion-dollar auction sales.

While the Chinese government may not have carefully calculated the extent to which contemporary Chinese art can give authoritarianism an international cachet, the effect is beyond doubt. In the work of Zhang Huan, Cai Guo-Qiang, Zhang Xiaogang, Wang Guangyi, and Yue Minjun, some of the worst atrocities of the past fifty years are rehabilitated. Make no mistake about it: many among the current generation of Chinese artists are in the business of re-educating the public. By the time they are done with the Cultural Revolution, it will be just another art event, neither more nor less significant than a performance by Joseph Beuys or Matthew Barney. These artists are dishonoring not only art, but life as well. So, too, are the collectors and curators and critics who abet them. What we have here is the most expensive propaganda the world has ever known. ◆

ANTHONY RUSSO

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Andrew J. Nathan

MEDALS AND RIGHTS

What the Olympics reveal, and conceal, about China.

I.

THE TWO MILLION foreign guests who are expected to visit Beijing in August will encounter a largely familiar and exceedingly cosmopolitan environment. They will find clean air, smooth traffic, easy Internet access, and standardized restaurant menus, all intended to provide them with seventeen days of physical, mental, and moral ease. Beijing has trained 1,500 "civilized bus riding supervisors," appointed 5,000 anti-jaywalking monitors, held "queuing awareness days," and mounted campaigns against spitting and slurping. The planners have paved over old neighborhoods to make way for five-star hotels, malls, and theme restaurants. Migrant workers who built the Olympic venues will have been dispatched back to the countryside, beggars and petitioners shipped home to their villages, and dissidents and would-be demonstrators placed under temporary house arrest or jailed. Visitors will see an edited Beijing, the way its governors and many of its residents would like it to be seen, a world capital with its exotic side under control.

And yet these same visitors may detect a deep ambivalence in the city's welcome. The pride may seem leavened with insecurity, the greeting tinged with rejection, the celebration not quite drowning out the whispers of doubt. China has arrived at the modernity it has been seeking for over a century, but it is not quite the modernity that we—and many Chinese—have been expecting.

Visitors may be struck first by Beijing's monumentalism. Old Beijing's charm lay in the narrow alleyways known as *hutongs*, courtyard houses, streetside handicrafts, and slow savors of life—all built, to be sure, on a system of class and gender exploitation that could not survive. Mao Zedong's new government after 1949 tore down the city walls and built Tiananmen Square as a vast public space to celebrate communist rule. But thanks more to economic stagnation than to city planning, much of the old city was preserved. The first stage of urban revolution happened indoors and underground. Multiple families were crammed into old houses, street trades were eliminated, and tunnels were dug for civil defense. The peddlers and handicraftsmen disappeared, and street life turned drab. But the alleyways and the low buildings of the capital remained largely untouched, at least physically.

Deng Xiaoping's commercial revolution after 1979 created crowds, bustle, supermarkets, fast food outlets, high rises, bland sprawling residential districts, and wide congested roads. Several international athletic events, such as the Asian Games in 1990, contributed new construction. And this year's Olympics has finally completed the destruction of the historical city, with a huge new airport terminal, thirty-one competition venues, new roads, subway lines, hotels, bridges, neighborhoods, and parks. What remains of the old-style houses and streets, crafts, means of transportation, and ways of life is mere outdoor museum displays, according to Lillian M. Li and her coauthors in their narrative of the city's lost past. Visitors should carry this readable book with them as an aid to imagining what is no longer there, and to understanding the political sources—including hubris and corruption—of what they see.

BEIJING: FROM IMPERIAL CAPITAL TO OLYMPIC CITY
By Lillian M. Li, Alison J. Dray-Novey, and Haili Kong (Palgrave Macmillan, 321 pp., $27.95)

BEIJING'S GAMES: WHAT THE OLYMPICS MEAN TO CHINA
By Susan Brownell (Rowman & Littlefield, 213 pp., $24.95)

OLYMPIC DREAMS: CHINA AND SPORTS, 1895-2008
By Xu Guoqi (Harvard University Press, 359 pp., $29.95)

CHINA'S GREAT LEAP: THE BEIJING GAMES AND OLYMPIAN HUMAN RIGHTS CHALLENGES
Edited by Minky Worden (Seven Stories Press, 331 pp., $18.95)

MARKETING DICTATORSHIP: PROPAGANDA AND THOUGHT WORK IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA
By Anne-Marie Brady (Rowman & Littlefield, 231 pp., $75)

OWNING THE OLYMPICS: NARRATIVES OF THE NEW CHINA
Edited by Monroe E. Price and Daniel Dayan (University of Michigan Press, 416 pp., 26.95)

THE MAIN OLYMPIC site north of the Forbidden City and Tiananmen Square sits at the top of the city's cosmologically significant north–south axis, explains Susan Brownell in her book on the anthropology of Chinese sports. It thus expresses the unity of sports and politics that the Chinese authorities and the International Olympic Committee have been at such pains to deny. Brownell says that planners at one point wanted the main stadium, referred to as the "Bird's Nest" because of its lattice-like construction, which was contrived to accommodate 11,000 VIPs so that the whole hierarchy of power could display itself before the people on this most auspicious occasion. The still-secret opening and closing ceremonies that have been designed for the arena will be global and glitzy, but they need to convey the same power, dignity, and order as did the old PRC aesthetic of massed gray suits, red ties, and primary-color potted flowers. After all, Hu Jintao's chief contribution to Chinese political thought in his six years in power has been the concept of the "harmonious society."

The Olympic buildings are diverse, and some of them are innovative. Yet in both the process of their construction and, I expect, in their use, they embody the dominance of the state. The public scale overwhelms the private scale, national power trumps personal comfort, and society's interests supersede individual rights. China's systems of land ownership, construction approvals, contracting, and labor discipline allowed quick and efficient displacement of residents (often through police and court collusion with developers, and the threat and use of violence), along with quick decisions on design, quick letting of contracts, and quick completion of projects. The buildings together announce that this is a society able and willing to consummate the Hegelian overcoming of its own past.

So, too, at the human level, China offers a political and social landscape in which those who are not part of the future make way for those who are. The individual fits in or gets out. Job ads for bank clerks and office workers specify sex, age, height, and good looks. A lawsuit a few years ago against height discrimination in job hiring was dismissed by a local court for lack of jurisdiction. A case on discrimination on account of looks was settled out of court with

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no precedential effect for other cases. The 380 hostesses guiding the athletes through the Olympic awards ceremonies will all be about the same age, height, and weight, and they have been trained to walk and gesture in standard ways.

By contrast, people who suffer from hepatitis B and HIV/AIDS are treated with widespread discrimination in college admission and employment. In search of something called "population security," couples are forbidden to bear more than one child, pregnancy screening has been upgraded to prevent "defective births," and mothers are taught how to raise children of "high quality." Despite the loosening of restrictions on migration for work, a legally entrenched caste system still grants rural residents political and social-welfare rights inferior to those of urban residents. Worsening income inequality shows its marks on the weathered faces of migrant workers who come to the cities from the villages to do the hardest labor, often going home cheated of their pay at the end of their term of employment.

The Olympics have been designed to showcase the upside of this dialectic: glass towers, modish people, prosperity, and health of every kind—economic, political, and physical. As Xu Guoqi points out, when China was the "sick man of Asia," many of its people were ill as well, and social thinkers of the time were obsessed with the connection between the two problems. They understood the relationship through the theory of social Darwinism, an idea then popular in the West, which held that human history was the story of competition for survival among the races. A Chinese elementary-school textbook of the 1920s explained that "Mankind is divided into five races. The yellow and white races are relatively strong and intelligent. Since the other races are feeble and stupid, they are being exterminated by the white race. Only the yellow race competes with the white race. This is so-called evolution." Mao Zedong's first known published essay was on physical culture, and his theme (borrowed from contemporary thinkers such as Liang Qichao) was that a strong nation must have strong people.

What Susan Brownell calls Chinese "body culture"—ideas of health and how to get it—revolves around notions such as "seminal essence" and "vital breath." These concepts inform such Chinese disciplines as *qigong* (slow-movement exercises) and *wushu* (martial arts), both of which she says are more about shaping the subjective experience of the body than about training the body for competition. The Chinese state does not invest much in facilities for everyday fitness. Rural residents and migrant workers get their exercise doing manual labor. Most urbanites "cultivate their life force" (*yangsheng*) through traditional arts—tai chi, walking, keeping birds, and writing calligraphy in water on the pavement—that can be practiced for free in parks and other public spaces. The anthropologists Judith Farquhar and Qicheng Zhang pointed out a few years ago that such gentle physical and spiritual exercises generate a calm, go-with-the-flow ambience that supports the regime's favored political quietism. Except for the new rich who belong to private golf or swim clubs, strenuous competitive sports belong to the arena of foreign policy, not everyday life.

Discobolus in a Mao suit sculpture by Sui Jianguo, Beijing, 2008

Western sports were brought to China by the YMCA in the early twentieth century to help internationalize the country. Xu Guoqi tells this story in his book on China's involvement with international sports. In the 1950s, the new communist government set up a nationwide physical-education system modeled on that of its ally, the Soviet Union. The purpose, the Physical Culture and Sports Commission said at the time, was "to give participants a stronger physique and will power in order to better serve socialism and the defense of the fatherland." In those days China's sports diplomacy was limited to the Soviet bloc and what were called "the Games of the Newly Emerging Forces," because the mainland People's Republic of China had withdrawn from the Olympic movement in the mid-1950s to protest the participation of the rival regime located on Taiwan, called the Republic of China.

Both Xu's and Brownell's books contain withering accounts of decades of the International Olympic Committee's clumsiness in handling the two-Chinas problem. Xu's analysis is based on research in the IOC archives; Brownell's is informed by conversations with a senior Chinese Olympics statesman, He Zhenliang, whose biography she has translated (*He Zhenliang and China's Olympic Dream*, by Liang Lijuan, published by Foreign Languages Press last year). They tell how the fictions that Olympic committees do not represent nations and IOC members transcend their countries' interests clashed with the zero-sum struggle over legitimacy between the PRC and the ROC. Each side claimed to be the government of all China, and each took turns boycotting games when the other was allowed to participate.

The American Avery Brundage, who served as IOC chair from 1952 to 1972, oscillated between trying to get both Chinas in and keeping them both out. When he tried to get the ROC committee to change its name, he earned a verbal flogging in the anti-communist U.S. press. When the Canadian government refused visas for the ROC team to participate under its national flag in the Montreal Games in 1976, Canada was roasted by American politicians. But four years later, after the United States had switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing, Washington copied the Canadian strategy and denied the ROC team the right to use its own name and flag in the Lake Placid Winter Games. It was not until 1984 in Los Angeles that both Chinas participated, having finally accepted a 1979 IOC proposal that Taiwan use the name "Chinese Taipei" and give up the right to display its national flag, anthem, and emblem. This so-called "Olympic formula" has subsequently been used to enable Taiwan's participation in a variety of official and unofficial settings, and is supposed to be used again in August when Taiwan's teams come to Beijing.

KEVIN HOLDEN / IMAGINECHINA / NEWSCOM

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Under Mao, talented athletes went to special schools run by the military. That system was restored after the Cultural Revolution and confronted a series of doping scandals in international competitions in the 1990s. The system has been civilianized, but today as in the past, Xu Guoqi reports, recruitment and training for international competition remain major priorities under central state planning. Little seems to be known about training methods or the physical cost to the athletes, although Xu reports that in order to keep their focus on their sport, athletes are not allowed to fall in love or to marry until they reach the age of twenty-eight for men and twenty-six for women. Brownell, herself a top track-and-field athlete who participated in the 1986 Chinese National College Games when she was an exchange student, corrects misrepresentations about athlete-automatons, genetic engineering, and child abuse. But she acknowledges, as do other authors, that the Chinese government puts most of its sports funding into competitive sport rather than community sport. The reason is that sports in China is about the nation, not the public. Having come in second to the United States in Athens in 2004, China is aiming for the highest number of gold medals in 2008.

II.

Few foreign visitors to Beijing will see—but surely few can be unaware of—the state repression that is as integral to the contemporary Chinese model as urban monumentalism, social conformity, and state-managed sports. In July 2007, police in northeast China arrested a peasant land-rights activist named Yang Chunlin who had collected thousands of signatures for a petition titled "We Want Human Rights, Not the Olympics." He was held and tortured for eight months, then tried and sentenced to a five-year prison term on the vague charge of "inciting subversion of state power." Lu Gengsong, a Hangzhou-based activist who campaigned online against official corruption, was sentenced to four years in February 2008 for the same crime. Wu Lihong, a farmer activist who exposed environmental pollution in Lake Tai in Jiangsu province, was sentenced to three years in 2007 on fake charges of fraud and extortion.

The government has intensified repression in the past two years in order to ensure order during the Olympics. The San Francisco–based Dui Hua Foundation says that arrests for endangering state security rose in 2007 to their highest level in eight years. The small cadre of Chinese "rights protection" lawyers who have stepped forward to defend political activists in court have been subjected to escalating beatings, detentions, and threats, as chillingly detailed in a recent Human Rights Watch report.

The government seems to treat critics who have foreign audiences with special venom, as if to remind outsiders how little their disapproval matters. Two of the best-known cases are Hu Jia and Chen Guangcheng. Hu Jia, an AIDS activist and blogger, was sentenced to three and a half years in April 2008 by a Beijing court for—again—inciting subversion of state power because of his writings, including an open letter on "The Real China and the Olympics." For months before his arrest, Hu had been harassed. At one point he posted on YouTube an ominous yet comic video of buff young plainclothes security agents outside his apartment smoking, lunching, and picking their teeth. When Hu's wife went on an errand, they crowded and jostled her like bullies in a high school hallway.

This must be especially terrifying when the bullies run the country. I have asked activists why they take such risks. They usually say that they know how to maneuver within the limits allowed by Chinese law. But for many of them this gamble eventually goes wrong, and Hu Jia was such a case. After his arrest, Hu was tortured with stress positions and sleep deprivation. As Jerome A. Cohen and Eva Pils have observed, "It is part of the logic of political systems that treat opposition as a crime that they must not only punish the opposition, but also break its spirit."

The case of Chen Guangcheng, the blind activist for women's rights, is even more egregious. Chen is a soft-spoken man in his early thirties who got involved in helping draft appeals against forced abortion and sterilization in the rural area where he lived, which is part of Linyi city in Shandong province. (Chinese cities administer surrounding rural areas.) After a visit to Beijing, Chen was kidnapped and brought home by public security agents from Linyi, who placed him under illegal house arrest. When he persisted, he was roughed up by thugs, then arrested on charges—intentionally ludicrous, for a blind person—of destroying property and assembling a crowd to disrupt traffic. Defense lawyers who came from Beijing to see him were taken off a bus, beaten, and kept from attending his trial, which produced a sentence of four years and three months. On appeal a higher court did something that virtually never happens in China—it sent the case back for rehearing. But the local court reaffirmed

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the original sentence, which Chen is currently serving under harsh conditions.

How do cases like this happen in the up-to-date China of Hu Jintao? As James Mann pointed out in *The China Fantasy*, many American politicians and businessmen claim to believe that China's leaders are forging ahead against cultural and social obstacles to establish the rule of law and democracy. Yet here was a case that must have been well known to Hu Jintao and "Grandpa" Wen Jiabao (as the premier identified himself to children during the recent earthquake relief efforts), a case so troubling that even a Chinese court intervened, a case that Hu and Wen could have corrected if they had wanted to.

Instead, the official who presided over the railroading of Chen Guangcheng was promoted. This official, named Li Qun, is a typical product of modern China's ladder of success, the Chinese Youth League system that produced Hu Jintao. Like many in today's techno-bureaucratic leadership, Li Qun is broadly experienced and lavishly credentialed. He studied physics at Shandong University, worked in the Chinese Youth League, served as mayor in a smaller Shandong city, took an executive training course in economics at the Shandong Party School, led a group of Shandong cadres to take a special M.P.A. course at New Haven University in Connecticut, and enrolled in an in-service Ph.D. course in "management engineering" at Northwest Industrial University in Xi'an, the capital of Shaanxi province.

At the time of Chen Guangcheng's persecution, Li Qun was Party secretary of Linyi. In China the local Party secretary runs everything—the police, courts, media, the people's congress (a rubber-stamp representative body), the population-planning bureaucracy, the agriculture bureau, industry, commerce, and so on. Li Qun's joint appointments (besides his Party role) were as mayor, head of the people's congress, and head of the local Party school; he also chaired or assigned his deputies to chair coordinating committees that exist in every Chinese territorial unit on legal and political affairs, family planning, propaganda, and other key sectors.

This universal Chinese set-up—some scholars call it "de facto federalism"—has produced both China's remarkable economic surge and its environmental disasters and rights abuses. The regime gives local officials full powers, and holds them accountable to achieve a short list of priority tasks. The key benchmarks are high economic growth, close conformity with mandated annual birth rates, and low levels of what the regime calls social disorder, such as demonstrations and episodes of collective petitioning. Having too many local citizens visit Beijing to petition national authorities counts as a black mark. To keep their records clean, according to a 2005 Human Rights Watch report, local officials send "retrievers" to Beijing forcibly to repatriate their local citizens who have gone there to petition. These well-dressed young men wait across the street from the petition offices with their car doors open, waiting to kidnap local citizens and bundle them home, often for terms of forced labor. This was what happened to Chen when he petitioned for Linyi women in Beijing.

Chen Guangcheng's activities threatened to weaken Li Qun's record on two counts essential for Li's promotion: family planning and social disorder. When Chen didn't get the message from harassment and beatings, Li Qun either did—or like King Richard caused to be done—what needed to be done, and had Chen convicted. Apparently the Party's secretive internal personnel department, the Organization Department, approved: in 2007 Li Qun was promoted to the post of head of Propaganda Department of Shandong provincial party committee.

Another successful Youth League alumnus was in charge of Tibet during the recent disturbances. Before going to Tibet, Zhang Qingli—coincidentally a Shandong native like Li Qun—held county- and city-level posts in his home province, did a stint in the central CYL office in Beijing, and served in provincial-level posts in Gansu and Xinjiang, in China's far west. Like Li, Zhang garnered a variety of academic credentials along the way and worked some of the time in propaganda. In late 2005, he was posted as Party secretary to Tibet.

There Zhang pushed the third round of a multi-year "patriotic education campaign" under way since 1996, which requires Tibetan monks and nuns to thank the motherland (meaning China) for the gift of modernization and to denounce the Dalai Lama for "splittism." Mickey Spiegel explains in her essay in the collection *China's Great Leap: How Our Leaders Explain Away Chinese Repression* that during such campaigns Party officials take over the monasteries, deciding who is promoted, what is published, and how daily rites are conducted. This time the Party tightened control even further by publishing a formal decree in July 2007 proclaiming that no incarnation of any lama would be valid in the future without government approval. This extended an existing practice. In 1995, the Party had named a Panchen Lama in violation of Tibetan religious procedures, taking custody of the incumbent recognized by most Tibetans and disappearing him from the public scene. And it had claimed the right to the final say in recognizing the future incarnation of the Dalai Lama. These are among the two highest lamas in Tibetan Buddhism. The "Measures on the Reincarnation of Living Buddhas," promulgated in 2007, extended this principle to the entire range of Tibetan religious leaders at even the lowest level.

During the patriotic education campaign, Zhang Qingli is said to have remarked that "the [Party] Central Committee is the real Buddha for Tibetans." Such statements do not register as insulting among most Han Chinese, because they reflect the social Darwinist conviction that religions are superstitions and minority cultures are backward. Such faiths and cultures are expected naturally to dissolve as their adherents experience modernization.

Among Tibetans, on the other hand, the campaign against their religion generated dissatisfaction even more intense than that created by Han-dominated, environmentally insensitive economic development. For this reason—and to take advantage of the international attention generated by the upcoming Olympics—young monks carried out peaceful demonstrations in Lhasa starting on March 10, which was the anniversary of the uprising against Chinese occupation in 1959. When the demonstrations spread and turned violent, Zhang Qingli rushed home from a meeting in Beijing to convene a Party and government conference on restoring order. He told those assembled that "the Dalai [Chinese officials don't grant their enemies the honorific "lama"] is a wolf in a monk's robe, a monster with a human face but the heart of a beast; we are in a fierce battle of blood and fire with the Dalai clique, a life and death battle between us and the enemy." There followed a violent crackdown revealing, among other things, the failure of the designated civil order force, the People's Armed Police, to master the crowd-control techniques they were supposed to have

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been studying since the Tiananmen tragedy nearly two decades ago.

There is no reason to think that Zhang's career will suffer for exacerbating the split between Han and Tibetans. After all, China's top ruler, Hu Jintao, was promoted to the status of heir apparent in 1992 partly on the strength of his having declared martial law in Lhasa in 1989. The government publicly rewards leaders who show toughness because it wants to make sure people understand that it is determined to keep control.

In some political systems, Li Qun's promotion to the post of provincial propaganda chief might count as being kicked upstairs. Not in China: propaganda is one of the most important domains in the Chinese party-state. It is thanks to the success of China's propaganda work that public assent is procured not only by repression, and runs both wide and deep. As Anne-Marie Brady demonstrates in a superb study of this central and hidden part of the Chinese system, the surface diversity of the Chinese media hides the guiding hand of a high-level Party office in Beijing called the Central Propaganda Department, which works its will across the whole spectrum of activities in media, education, entertainment—and also in sports. Deliciously, Brady reveals that the department is funded partly by a 3 percent tax on enterprises ranging from bookstores to karaoke bars, golf courses, and bowling alleys, because all these units fall within its orbit of control; and it uses these funds partly to support Party and army publications, rural bookstores, literature prizes, and social science research. She does not say whether the Beijing Olympic Committee is also paying this tax, but it may well be doing so, since sports are under the partial control of the propaganda system.

Brady reveals that China's central propagandists have studied the theories of "manufacturing consent" by Walter Lippmann and Edward Bernays, and have learned from media critics such as Noam Chomsky, and—although she does not make quite this ultimate ironic point—emulate such Western visionaries of popular journalism as Rupert Murdoch. They know how diversity and contention within a permitted range of subjects render invisible the subjects forbidden by the regime and placed outside the perimeter; how naming and framing place inconvenient facts in a desired light. The department intervenes at all levels of the media hierarchy through a system of news guidance, post-publication review, and reward and punishment. Its most effective tool is a traditional Chinese invention rather than a Western import: a "you know what we mean" style of regulation that allows experimentation, tolerates ambiguity, and then punishes retroactively and arbitrarily.

The efflorescence of creativity that foreign visitors will see in Beijing in August is not a challenge to Party control. It enables that control. The lively art and music scenes, colorful newsstands, crowded bookstores, stylish clothing, experimental dance, innovative architecture, sexy advertising, rampant consumerism, luxurious housing, ebullient schlock, even the considerable scope for academic inquiry: this lightly patrolled free zone is not the antithesis but the twin of the permanent crackdown on the political frontier, where the few who insist on testing the regime are crowded to the cultural margin and generally ignored. In this sense the energetic new Chinese art that has caught the imagination of Western buyers, with its pictorial irony and cynicism, repudiation of history, detachment from the world, and love of stunts, is not the challenge to those in power it is sometimes construed to be. Rather, it is a secret joke that the regime shares with the artists and their audience—part of a new social contract that allows the children to have their sly fun so long as the grown-ups run the house.

Brady argues that the end result of this sophisticated cultural programming differs little from the mass media in the West, where just as in China nothing important is discussed. Like American TV viewers and tabloid readers transfixed by the photo shoot of the teenage star Miley Cyrus and the debate over whether to lift the federal gas tax for the summer driving season, Chinese readers feel they are living in an environment of freedom. The difference is that even those motivated to do so have no way to break into the monopoly circle that decides on the fundamental issues that confront their society.

III.

The Beijing Olympics have never been anything but a conscious part of this strategy—what Brady nicely calls a campaign of mass distraction. *Owning the Olympics: Narratives of the New China* is a grudgingly admiring analysis by communications specialists in the West of the Beijing organizers' strategies for "seizing the platform," shaping the space, and "controlling the narrative." A central theme is

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that the Olympics redefine citizenship—both Chinese and foreign—as consumership, abetting the depoliticization of public life that lies at the heart of China's post-Mao propaganda strategy.

Indeed, the Beijing Olympics mark the full mastery of marketing techniques by Chinese bureaucrats. According to Xu Guoqi, "The Beijing organizing committee hopes that through merchandising, sponsorships, and other commercial applications, China's logo will by and large pay for the Games." (This hope may have failed, given the escalating costs noted by domestic critics.) Authorized vendors have sold zillions of dolls, keychains, T-shirts, Swatch watches, papercuts, and telephones representing the five Olympic mascots—the saccharine, symbolically laden, and cutely named *fuwa*. The official game logo, a running stick figure against a red background, has been crammed with meanings: the running man is both winning a race and throwing his arms out in welcome; the shape of his body resembles the Chinese character for *jing* in Beijing; and the red background evokes a traditional Chinese chop by which people used to sign their names on documents and precious art works.

To be sure, the Olympics so far have not entirely worked out the way the planners intended. Beijing's bid in 1993 for the 2000 games was defeated at least partly on human rights grounds (although Frank Ching implies in *China's Great Leap* that bribery from the winning city of Sydney had more to do with it). It is not clear whether Beijing made explicit human rights commitments in its second bid. Sharon K. Hom notes, in *China's Great Leap*, that despite numerous requests, the host city contract has never been made public. Brady says foreign p.r. consultants advised Chinese officials to mention human rights in the bid document, and Brownell reveals that they debated at the very high vice-premier level whether to do so, deciding in the end to keep such mentions informal. This may explain a remark—often cited by critics—made around that time by Liu Jingmin, vice president of the Beijing Olympic Bid Committee, who said that allowing Beijing to host the Games would "help the development of human rights." Whether or not human rights were explicitly included, Beijing certainly made pledges that it would not fulfill. *China's Great Leap* documents non-compliance with all four elements of the published 2002 Beijing Olympic Action Plan: Green Olympics, High-Tech Olympics, Free and Open Olympics, and People's Olympics. Even the logo has evoked ironic caricatures, including one in which the red running man is the bloody silhouette of a firing-squad victim.

The campaigns to embarrass China over the 2008 Olympics have been as long in the works as the Games themselves. From the moment the Games were awarded to Beijing in July 2001, human rights advocates, instead of calling for a boycott, began planning to use the event to ramp up pressure on the Chinese government. Human Rights Watch and Human Rights in China set up special websites tracking the Beijing organizing committee's failure to make good its commitments. (I am on the Asia advisory committee of the former and am board co-chair of the latter.) The Committee to Protect Journalists issued a series of reports on violations of press freedom. Amnesty International's "Olympics Countdown" series has tracked violations over the two-year period leading to the games. Chinese Human Rights Defenders has issued an "Olympic Watch" series of press releases. The Save Darfur campaign and an offshoot, Olympic Dream for Darfur, pressed China to address the Darfur problem via the link between Beijing and Khartoum. Advocacy groups recently demonstrated along the route of the Olympic torch, clashing with blue-and-white-suited Chinese escorts who were drawn from the student body of the People's Armed Police academy.

All this is also propaganda, of course—human rights groups prefer the term "advocacy"; but precisely for that reason it is a mystery why the Chinese leaders and the IOC ever thought they could get away with throwing a party to celebrate China's accomplishments at which no one would mention China's shortcomings. Why did China put its face out to be slapped? And why did the IOC abet them in doing so? Evidently both parties were blinded by the charm of their own blarney, the line that sports is only sports.

But in the end this miscalculation has not mattered much. In the Chinese leaders' accurate *realpolitik* analysis, they had already stared down Western human rights pressure after Tiananmen, defeated Bill Clinton's "human rights conditionality" in 1994, rolled back post-Tiananmen sanctions, forged alliances with other rights-violating states to pull out the teeth of the United Nations Human Rights Council, and pushed Western criticism into the confidential government-to-government "human rights dialogue" and "private diplomacy" channels where there is no fear of real action. The West's economic interdependence with China has become so intense that an Olympic boycott—or indeed any effective sanction against China—has become unthinkable.

At home, if the government cannot have Western approval, it can make stone soup out of disapproval by playing the criticisms as an attack on the pride of the nation. This official attitude was well expressed in a book that Chen Guangcheng's persecutor, Li Qun, published in 2004, well before the Olympic controversies had reached high pitch. During his studies at New Haven University in 2000, Li Qun did an internship in the office of Mayor John DeStefano Jr., and after his return he published a book unforgettably titled *I Was a Mayor's Assistant in America*. He described his studies in America as a "political test" that confirmed his confidence in the road of socialism with Chinese characteristics. "Most Americans," Li wrote, "are friendly to China, although they do not understand it very well. But a small group of politicians strike the banners of democracy and human rights to critique us constantly by their own standards, distort things, and interfere with our domestic affairs. Their real purpose is not to protect the so-called human rights but to use this pretext to influence and limit China's healthy economic growth and to prevent China's wealth and power from threatening their world hegemony."

There is no reason to doubt the authenticity of Li's sentiments, clichéd though they are, or the degree to which they represent the views of many Chinese

Snow-Globe of Vesuvius

I live on the flank of Vesuvius, in Pompeii.
Each day the sky fills with leaflets,
smokelets, prayers to powers
aglitter whether storming or still
(the old ones mica,
the new ones who-cares-what).

Everyone knows there's more than one
kind of consciousness. Everyone knows
that in the snow-globe of Vesuvius,
the "snow" is really ash—
each time, the volcano buries the town.

Would you meet me in a world like that?
If not there, where?

CHASE TWICHELL

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inside China and out. Coming to the United States and seeing how things work here does not necessarily shake the faith of Chinese officials, or students, in their country's way of doing things. Quite remarkably, and in general for the better, tens of thousands of Chinese students have returned home from the West to play their willing roles in academia, the media, business, and other sectors, accepting subordination to the ruling party and its national project.

Thus it is not only China's growing military and economic power that renders it less and less vulnerable to human rights advocacy, which depends on international reputational costs. Perhaps even more importantly, the government is protected by its success in shaping its own public's reaction to the criticism. Indeed, the regime faces more risk in yielding to Western criticism than in being subjected to it. The audiences that matter are not in the United States and Europe, but in China and the Third World. Even the main Olympic sponsors—GE, Coca-Cola, Kodak, McDonald's, Visa, and seven other American and foreign companies, who are front and center in the eyes of international consumers—have decided to hunker down and absorb whatever hits cannot be avoided in order to protect their enormous long-range stakes in China. This is an almost unimaginably large market, and a market that remembers. Name and shame works with countries dependent on the West, but China is no longer such a country.

Xu Guoqi raises the possibility that the Olympics will lead to the transformation of the Chinese regime the way the Seoul Games in 1988 brought on Korean democratization. True, the regime this year has suffered a series of what some Chinese see as cosmological portents—a crippling snowstorm, Tibetan unrest, and the huge Sichuan earthquake. The leaders certainly react to any such challenge, and much smaller ones, as if their rule is fragile. Yet sophisticated crisis management and canny media spin have earned the government broad public support each time. Even if an unexpected event occurs in August—something security agencies have been gearing up to prevent—the likely consequence will be to strengthen the regime's already robust grip on power. Assertive and unapologetic, the new and future China now struts the stage. Its character dovetails with what is reported to be the forceful personality of the designated future leader, Xi Jinping, currently the vice president, who is slated to succeed Hu Jintao in 2012.

This is modern China. It is not what we imagined it would be when Richard Nixon wrote forty years ago that we should not leave China "forever outside the family of nations, there to nurture its fantasies, cherish its hates, and threaten its neighbors," and started us down the path of engagement. When we wondered all these years whether China would modernize or not, Westernize or not, become civilized or not, we were asking the wrong questions, making the wrong distinctions. What we got instead is a China that is both proud and resentful, open and closed, like us yet not at all like us. We used our three wishes and now we must live with what we got. The onetime sick man of Asia is in exuberant health—that is the intended message of the Beijing Olympics, and the unintended one. ◆

Alan Wolfe

HEDONIC MAN

The new economics and the pursuit of happiness.

HAPPINESS: A REVOLUTION IN ECONOMICS (MUNICH LECTURES IN ECONOMICS)
By Bruno S. Frey
(MIT Press, 240 pp., $35)

PREDICTABLY IRRATIONAL: THE HIDDEN FORCES THAT SHAPE OUR DECISIONS
by Dan Ariely
(HarperCollins, 280 pp., $25.95)

I.

When I first began hearing about what Bruno S. Frey, professor of economics at the University of Zurich, calls the "revolution" in his discipline, my reaction was one of delight. As far as I was concerned, it could not happen fast enough. Neoclassical economists had insisted upon the primacy of self-interest only in order to model human behavior, but the way rational choice theory developed (at the University of Chicago in particular) suggested that self-interest was not just a fact for these thinkers, but also an ideal: not just how people do act but also how they should act. Their relentless advocacy of market-based public policies was finally ideological—and, by my lights, ideologically wrong. Also the jargon grew impenetrable, and the mathematics ostentatious and obnoxious. When Chicago-style economists started to apply their methods to other social science disciplines, and then to virtually all the perplexities of human life, the charge of academic imperialism could be added. Friedrich August von Hayek and Milton Friedman had always seemed to me to be marginal and somewhat bizarre thinkers, especially when compared to such intellectual titans as John Maynard Keynes and Joseph Schumpeter. The rapid spread of their ideas throughout so much of academia did not bode well for the future.

And so I was heartened by the first sustained attacks on neoclassical economics. For one thing, the thinkers who launched them—Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky—seemed to be geniuses of some sort. Both had good reason to become fascinated with how human beings make decisions. Kahneman was born in Tel Aviv in 1934 and raised in Paris; his family decided to remain in France after the Nazis took over the country, and then to rely on business connections to spring his father from the death camps, and then to move to Palestine before the creation of the state of Israel. Tversky, born in Haifa in 1937, earned, at the age of nineteen, Israel's highest military decoration, for rescuing a fellow soldier from an exploding device, in the process injuring himself. These men grew up under conditions that might have led them to divide the world into black and white, good and evil, but this did not happen. Instead they developed an appreciation of human complexity, even a love for it. "Some people were better than others," Kahneman described what he learned from his parents, "but the best were far from perfect and no one was simply bad."

The collaboration of Kahneman and Tversky produced one of the major intellectual accomplishments of the late twentieth century: a series of ingeniously designed experiments that raised uncomfortable questions about "utility maximization," which was the major assumption of microeconomics. To wit: it makes no difference in theory whether you lose a ticket to a play or lose the $10 that the ticket cost, but when people lose the ticket they are far less likely to buy another one than when they lose the money. Kahneman and Tversky's explanation is

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that we create a mental account such that it makes sense to us to pay $10 to see a play but not $20, even though the utility sacrificed by losing the ticket and the money is identical.

Tversky died of cancer in 1996. Kahneman won the Nobel Prize in economics in 2002, and is an emeritus professor at Princeton. Between them, they rattled the role of reason in the pantheon of human motives. They made clear that even if we think we know what is in our own best interest, we frequently make decisions based on misinformation, myopia, and plain quirkiness. The picture of human nature that they developed was—in contrast to the world of *homo economicus*—ironic, skeptical, almost wickedly complex.

No single figure did more to bring the insights of these two economic psychologists (or psychological economists) to economics than Richard H. Thaler of the University of Chicago. "When I read this paper," he wrote of Kahneman and Tversky's classic article "Judgment Under Uncertainty," which appeared in 1974, "I could hardly contain myself." Although trained in neoclassical economics, Thaler developed something of a furtive addiction to what his immersion in psychology had revealed to him. In the 1970s he spent considerable time with Kahneman and Tversky, after which he published a series of papers applying their insights to a wide range of economic activity, especially those involving finance. *Quasi Rational Economics*, published by the Russell Sage Foundation in 1991, collected those early papers and made them influential. The title of the volume suggested that we are not always rational and we are not always irrational. Yes, people deviate from the models of human behavior associated with neoclassical economics, but usually "in well-defined situations ... under careful laboratory controls," as well as "in natural settings such as the stock market." The theme of Thaler's book was that traditional economic assumptions about human behavior needed to be altered, not replaced.

What Kahneman and Tversky began and Thaler solidified is now frequently called behavioral economics. Its leading figures continue to sparkle. Steven D. Levitt, the co-author of *Freakonomics*, writes decent prose—or at least is willing to work with a journalist who does; and he, too, teaches at Chicago. The topics that behavioral economists address range far and wide, and often have little to do with the realm of getting and spending. They are interesting, intriguing, and sometimes too cute: raising children, deterring crime, gambling, choosing names. The public-policy implications associated with this way of thinking are anything but predictably right-wing, and in the person of Austan Goolsbee, another economist at Chicago who is also Barack Obama's chief economic adviser, they now figure prominently in American politics.

Thaler has recently collaborated with his former legal colleague Cass R. Sunstein (a frequent contributor to these pages) on a book called *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness,* which introduces a concept that the authors call "libertarian paternalism." This provocative oxymoron seeks a middle way between laissez-faire and the heavy hand of governmental regulation: public policy, by providing "choice architecture," can push people toward decisions that make the most overall sense, as opposed to coercing them or being indifferent to their preferences. Only time will tell whether "libertarian paternalism" offers a new way of thinking about public policy that can lead to major legislative accomplishment, or instead represents the kind of bland centrist politics that a decidedly non-Chicago economist, Paul Krugman, denounces as hopelessly naïve. But there is no denying that just as Levitt brought behavioral economics to the best-seller lists, Thaler and Sunstein are bringing it to the think tanks and maybe even to the West Wing.

The revolution begun by Kahneman and Tversky is now some three decades old, and it is generating excitement well beyond the borders of academe—and so this is a good time to examine whether it has lived up to its promise. Bruno S. Frey's *Happiness* and Dan Ariely's *Predictably Irrational* together offer a fine occasion to begin such a reckoning. Not all the revolutionaries in economics are discussed by Frey; the media star Levitt does not even make an appearance. Ariely, who teaches at MIT, helps to fill in the picture. Like Levitt, he has climbed the best-seller list with some of the most counterintuitive findings of behavioral economics. One is dry and humorless, the other is sprightly and inviting, but between them these books offer an overview of what this new economics is all about, and enable us to evaluate whether it is as innovative as its adherents claim.

II.

One major conviction drives the new economics. Economists used to believe that it was unnecessary to measure utility except in this way: the price that a person was willing to pay for something established its utility, and so there was no need to dig any deeper, to examine what was driving the psyche of the economic actor. But the behavioral revolution in economics challenges this assumption. It is based on the idea that we must look into that black box called the human mind to find out whether the things that we say we want really do give us pleasure. Utility, after the revolution, is no longer abstract. It is lived, experienced; it is existential. And fortunately, or so these books argue, the field of psychology has uncovered timely and fascinating truths about the ways our minds work, and these insights may breathe new life into the old idea of utility. Hedonic psychology, happiness research, behavioral economics, economic psychology, the study of well-being, judgment and decision-making—call it what you want. Suddenly everything we thought we knew about economics begins to look different.

Happiness, of course, is anything but a new idea in Western thought. It is, for one thing, the core principle of utilitarianism, the philosophical outlook associated with James Mill and Jeremy Bentham, according to which the most accurate description of human beings is that they seek pleasure and avoid pain. Dickens rather brutally satirized the utilitarians with the unforgettable character of Thomas Gradgrind in *Hard Times*, and ever since the notion of human beings as calculators of pain and pleasure has been subject to the withering criticism of philosophers, who have shown that utilitarianism pays inadequate attention to the full complexity of human decision-making, particularly in the moral sphere.

But the new economics proceeds in perfect indifference to Gradgrind and the philosophers. It is, in fact, a revival of utilitarianism. In 1999, the Russell Sage Foundation published *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology*, edited by Daniel Kahneman, Ed Diener, and Norbert Schwarz. Intended as a major statement of the new field's potential, the volume included Kahneman's seminal essay "Objective Happiness," in which he tells the following story. Someone tells us that Helen had been happy in March. How do we know? If the issue is how sick Helen had been, we would know how to answer the question. Suppose Helen's temperature had been taken every ten minutes for every day of the month. With that data we could plot the results and come up with an answer that any objective observer could accept: if Helen had never registered a fever during that time,

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we could conclude incontrovertibly that she had been well. We need not even have monitored her so carefully. If her temperature readings had been sampled at random intervals, we could still decide, with a statistically ascertainable degree of certainty, that her health had been fine.

Is happiness any different? No, according to Kahneman, at least not in theory. The Victorian economist Francis Edgeworth, a disciple of Bentham, understood as much: he anticipated using a "hedonimeter" to measure the goodness or the badness of the things that we encounter in daily life. Edgeworth, Kahneman believes, was on the right track. It is true that the mind is a complex thing and we are unlikely ever to have perfect measures of what the neo-utilitarian Kahneman calls "instant utility," or the immediate good sensations or bad sensations that register in our minds every time we encounter something in the world. Still, weaker measures of instant utility are available to us. Why not sample Helen's feelings just as we sample her temperature?

"Helen might be probed at irregular intervals by a beeper mounted in a special watch, which also displays a scale on which she can select a value that describes the GB [good-bad] value of the moment," Kahneman suggests. It still might be difficult for her to compare the pleasure of eating a slice of key lime pie with, say, the pleasure of an orgy with six of her friends. (This is my example, not Kahneman's.) Still, all is not lost. Helen can simply be instructed about the scales appropriate for different kinds of experiences. "Fantastic" can have one meaning in the context of a dessert and another in the context of group sex, and any subject can learn which attributes best go with which experiences. (Sex, as we learn from another tool of the new economics—the Day Reconstruction Method, which asks people to recall everything they did on a particular day—takes up on average ten minutes out of every twenty-four hours, compared to socializing and relaxing, which occupies 120 minutes.)

Helen, of course, does not exist. This is a thought experiment. The premise of Kahneman's article is that we should not be satisfied with the techniques available to measure happiness, but should think more about what happiness actually is, and then develop techniques appropriate to it. Some types of experiences "will eventually be clarified by studies of relevant brain activities." Helen "could eventually learn" to compare pleasures across different realms of life. Greater validity of the kinds of reports that Helen gives "may emerge from research on the neuropsychology and psychophysiology of affect." Some day, in other words, Edgeworth's hedonimeter will be a staple of academic departments of psychology and economics, and that day may well come soon: "The movement from science fiction to practical application is likely to be rapid in this domain." Writing in the future tense may seem an odd choice for a social scientist interested in people's behavior in the here-and-now, but every proclaimed revolution in the social sciences—from the behavioral revolution in political science of the 1950s to the fascination with evolutionary theory today—promises something new around the corner.

Kahneman's essay was published almost a decade ago. Where are we now? If Frey's book is any indication, the revolution in economics has taken a giant step backward. Happiness, Frey tells us, need not be established objectively at all. We can instead rely on what he calls "reported subjective well-being." Even if you have not heard this term, you most likely know to what it refers. Surveys routinely ask people questions like this one, which is included in the Euro-Barometer Survey: "On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the life you lead?" And that, pretty much, is Frey's exciting new method. Take people's answers, run the correlations with other variables, and get your findings. And so we learn that people who watch a lot of television are less likely to say that they are satisfied with their lives than people who watch less. This is important, Frey concludes, because it shows that "individuals have systematically imperfect foresight and control over their own behavior in a major present-day human activity." They know that watching television is not good for their happiness, but, being weak of will, they do it anyway.

From the standpoint of the right to privacy, I confess to being, well, happy that economists are not using hand-held computers to monitor people's thoughts every fifteen minutes or so. But from the standpoint of what we know about the world, it seems anything but revolutionary for economists to rely on surveys that have been around, relatively unchanged, for more than half a century. Asking people how they feel about their lives is something that social scientists do because it is something that social scientists can do. Anyone who has conducted a survey knows how imperfect a measure of anything it is. Indeed, it was precisely because the answers people give to questions are so dependent upon random events or arbitrary word order that Kahneman began his quest for the holy grail of scientistic precision. Frey recognizes these limitations, and cites a paper by Norbert Schwarz and Fritz Stark in *Well-Being* that leaves the validity of such subjective reports in tatters. Still, he winds up using them anyway. "It is a sensible tradition in economics to rely on the judgment of the persons directly involved," he maintains. "People are reckoned to be the best judges of the overall quality of their lives, and it is a straightforward strategy to ask them about their well-being."

If this is the best Frey can do, it helps to explain why old Edgeworth is not in the economics Hall of Fame. People buy televisions, including very expensive high-definition ones. They sign cable-television contracts that cost more than their electric bills. They spend time in front of the television that could be spent accumulating higher incomes—or, for that matter, enjoying their daily ten minutes of sex. Does this mean that watching television makes them happy? There can never be a perfect answer to that question: it is no more likely that our minds possess something called H, a constant measure of happiness applicable to all forms of experience, than that they possess something called G, general intelligence that can be measured through testing.

The proper question, therefore, is not whether happiness is better measured objectively or subjectively. It is, rather, the question of which of the many imperfect measures of happiness we ought to rely upon. If Frey is right that people are the best judges of their own lives, shouldn't we rely on the preferences revealed by their judgment to buy and watch television? After all, price is measured ordinally: $100 is one hundred times greater than $1. But life satisfaction, by contrast, is measured cardinally: the extent to which "very satisfied" is better than "satisfied" has to be established arbitrarily. Between two imperfect metrics, surely it is better to choose the one with fewer measurement problems. That is why economists started assuming that income can be used to measure welfare, or price to ascertain utility to any particular person.

Purchasing a television is not, of course, a life-and-death decision—which suggests that when we move away from the commodities of everyday life to more serious issues, we might be justified in using subjective methods. But this does not follow. The Scandinavian countries have high suicide rates. Suicide is generally

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associated with depression. May we conclude, then, that Scandinavians are unhappy? That, too, is a hard question to answer, especially because Scandinavians generally tell survey researchers that they are satisfied with their lives: 64 percent of Danes, for example, compared with 16 percent of the French. Here we have a choice between two measures of happiness, both of them problematic: suicide rates, which, while not always accurate—in more religious societies coroners are likely to record suicide as death by natural causes—are at least factual; and subjective well-being, which is deeply imprecise and dependent upon mood. Which to choose?

For Frey, this is a no-brainer: he downplays suicide rates, explaining them away, without providing any evidence, by saying that Scandinavians also have high divorce rates and tend not to believe in God. Emile Durkheim long ago demonstrated that suicide rates tell us something about social solidarity (as do divorce rates, by the way); but Frey insists that subjective measures of well-being have an advantage that outweighs more objective data. Alas for the cause of science, this advantage has little to with reliability or validity, but a lot to do with money: "The great advantages of this measurement approach lie in its good performance relative to its cost and its availability for a large number of countries and periods." Frey's preference for subjectivity is determined objectively: by price.

All this might not be a problem if the findings established by relying on subjective well-being taught us things we otherwise would not have understood. But just as revolutions in social science are always predicting future benefits that never seem to materialize, they also possess an unfortunate tendency to nail down exceptionally trivial findings. Frey's revolution is no exception. Imagine a graph in which we rank on the vertical axis answers to questions about life satisfaction by country, and on the horizontal axis the number of terrorist incidents experienced in those countries. It turns that people who live without terrorism are happier with their lives than people who live with it. I don't know how much government officials would be willing to pay for such allegedly revolutionary advice, but if I were told by my expensive consultants that "curbing terrorists is . . . important to making the population happier," I would ask for my money back.

And so it goes. Unemployed people are less happy than those with jobs. People who live in rich countries are happier than those who live in poor ones. Inflation harms individual well-being. Married people are happier than single people. Americans are made less unhappy by economic inequality than Europeans. I guess it is good that someone has come along and established these things. But is this a science, let alone a scientific revolution? Give me rational choice theory any day: at least in my own area of concern, the sociology of religion, it has established one surprising finding, which is that even when it comes to matters involving another world, people pick and choose their faith based on its costs and benefits in this one.

III.

The social sciences are not just empirical; they are normative, too. It was precisely the insistent normative preference for market-based social arrangements that turned me against Chicago School economics. Governmental regulation is always sub-optimal, they inevitably maintained. Individual freedom is worth more than social equality. If market logic works for firms, surely it can work for recruiting an army, fighting poverty, or providing kidneys. Non-Chicago economists were subtler about these matters, and at times questioned the reliance on markets; but for the many sons and daughters of Milton Friedman, we are hard-wired to be rational choosers, and any efforts we make to direct the course of our actions collectively are bound to fail. Myself, I do not believe that any of these propositions bring us closer to a good society. Other people feel differently. Democracy requires that we argue out our differences. But democratic debate is not well served by pretending that the empirical findings of a single controversial approach in a single academic discipline contain definitive answers to these questions.

Despite all this, Frey believes that a focus on happiness can help us resolve some of the normative questions that we face. Is democracy a good form of government? If so, is more democracy better than less? Relying upon surveys of reported well-being, Frey answers both questions in the affirmative. And there is a superficial plausibility to this line of argument; the Declaration of Independence, as Frey points out, mentions happiness as one of the rights endowed to us by our creator, and at least one major political philosopher, Aristotle, insisted on the importance of *eudaimonia*, which is usually translated as happiness. There is, moreover, a remarkable correlation between democracy and subjective happiness: one study of twenty-eight countries showed the lowest percentage of very happy people in Hungary, Russia, Latvia, and Slovakia, all very recent democracies, and the highest in such well-established democratic societies as Ireland, the United States, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand. And then, of course, there is the authority of Bentham, who argued that society ought to be organized to provide the greatest good to the greatest number of people; if democracy does that, as the evidence seems to show, then democracy is normatively preferable to non-democracy on utilitarian grounds.

Here, alas, is where utilitarianism's severe limitations come into play. Although he was raised on the idea, John Stuart Mill eventually found utilitarianism far too limiting to account for what is most valuable in human existence—as he famously put it, "Better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied." For all its identification with happiness, utilitarianism (its critics rightly claim) all too often rationalizes cruelty. As Bernard Williams once pointed out, it would justify the decision of someone who murders one person to save twenty people, and such a justification, by focusing only on the consequences of our actions, leaves no room for considerations of integrity and recognizes no moral commands against killing. Along similar lines, when the animal-rights activist and committed utilitarian Peter Singer argued that it is justified to kill infants who suffer from Down syndrome, he did not exactly improve utilitarianism's ethical reputation. Philosophers continue to debate Bentham's legacy, and distinctions and qualifications multiply, but it would be difficult to find any modern moral theory more discredited than this one. If you believe that human beings come equipped with a conscience capable of distinguishing between right and wrong, then you ought not to go where Bentham wishes to lead you. But the revolution in economics now proclaims—as Kahneman (along with Peter P. Wakker and Rakesh Sarin) put it in an article in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* in 1997—that we should go "back to Bentham." It appears that Kahneman, Frey, and others in this tradition will take a satisfied fool any day.

But are democratic societies happy because they are composed of satisfied fools? Utilitarianism cannot answer that question. It can demand that societies ought to be evaluated for the happiness that they produce, but it cannot tell us, at least not without being tautological, why we ought to prefer happiness in

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the first place. For Frey it is simply self-evident that we should prefer happiness to unhappiness. But Mill, for one, was not convinced that this would always be the case. The remarkable chapter on the "Crisis In My Mental History" in his *Autobiography* hauntingly documents his disillusionment with the enshrining of happiness as the highest human goal. And in his brilliant and affecting essays on Bentham and Coleridge, he made his preference for the latter unmistakable. What was lacking in Bentham, Mill argued, was a full humanity, which must include a tragic sense of life. Poets, by contrast, when they peer deeply into the nature of things, do not reveal much that is pleasant; but for all their melancholy, they shed light on what it means to be human. In art, in philosophy, in religion, in all the inquiries into the meaning of human life, an unhappy consciousness may take us further toward understanding than a Bovary-like contentment.

The same is decidedly not true of politics, of course, where discontent all too often is accompanied by blood. Yet the notion that we should prefer democracy to other forms of government because democracy better maximizes happiness is too *Brave New World*–ish even for Frey to accept. Western societies consider wealth important, and so they develop a measure of it called gross national product to judge their progress. If happiness is important, then we ought to have a "national happiness indicator" to measure how far we have come. Frey ponders the idea, but he elects not to endorse it. He worries that benevolent dictators might arise who will attempt to make people happy over their objections. He points out that once we begin to use measures of personal satisfaction—eudaemonistic standards—for policy purposes, people might begin to lie about how satisfied they really are. Far better, then, that economists should simply study happiness and make policy recommendations, but leave individuals free to decide whether or not to follow them. If they do, fine. The choice for Frey, as for the neoclassical tradition in economics, ought to be left to the individual.

But what if people reject the option that gives them the greatest amount of happiness? In line with his preference for individual choice, Frey wants to leave that option open to them—but when people exercise it, surely they are expressing a preference for something other than happiness, whether it be autonomy, self-esteem, loyalty, or a recognition that it would in fact be wrong to take a life even if your actions improved the overall happiness of your fellow citizens. And so even though we are told on the first page of Frey's book that "the ultimate goal of most human beings is to be happy," we are informed at the end of the book that "whether happiness is the ultimate goal of individuals, or whether it is only one of several goals, constitutes a deep and much-discussed question in philosophy," and is therefore by implication not resolvable by economists. It took Frey an entire book written on behalf of the priority of happiness to conclude that it might not have such a high priority after all. And after this breathless tour through the new economics, we are left to understand that economics will not do the trick. Frey is certainly right about the limitations of economics in the matter of the most profound questions of human life. But there is also another implication that is not addressed: if happiness is only one of many goals that human beings seek, then making happiness central to economics is unlikely to cause much of a revolution in the field.

Dressed skeleton of Jeremy Bentham with wax head, British Museum

PHOTO BY BRUCE DALE/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC/GETTY IMAGES

Even more serious problems emerge when Frey tries to make the case that more democracy is better than less democracy. By more democracy, Frey refers to such forms of direct voter participation as the initiative, the referendum, and the recall. In Switzerland, where Frey lives, it is possible to correlate where people stand on the life-satisfaction survey with the extent to which their cantons rely on direct democracy: the greater the participation of ordinary people, he reports, the greater the happiness. The same is not quite true in the United States, where states with direct democracy provide fewer services for their citizens, but (Frey hopefully adds) also spend more on education. The United States, moreover, like Switzerland, has a federal system of government, and federalism, he argues, promotes happiness as well, because decentralized and overlapping political units are more democratic than highly centralized and authoritative ones.

Except for trying to show how economists can address problems faced by other social science disciplines, Frey is not particularly interested in what those disciplines have to offer, and so he ignores the large body of research conducted by political scientists showing the flaws of direct democracy. (To cite only one example, this one involving happiness: California's initiative process is fueled by substantial levels of cynicism toward politicians, and, by promising more than it can deliver, it adds to public frustration with politics.) But this is the least of his problems. For when he addresses the problem of democracy in explicitly normative terms, Frey actually finds himself advocating something that would not allow individuals to exercise much control over the political decisions that are made on their behalf.

The problem, as he analyzes it, comes down to this: in the absence of competition, political leaders will form "cartels" designed to "exploit the voters." Direct democracy is therefore a good thing, because it breaks up such monopolies, which, in turn, explains why members of the political cartel oppose such populist measures. Empirically speaking, Frey offers no evidence for this claim—most likely because there is none: referenda almost never emerge from below, but are usually the product of one elite group trying to rally public support in order to defeat another elite group. The same is true of federalism. It was enshrined in

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the American system of government not to extend democracy but to protect slavery, and "state's rights" has been the rallying cry of regional elites ever since. In the real world, both direct democracy and federalism further elite control, and for one obvious reason: in any kind of democracy, representative or direct, people do not themselves rule, but choose the leaders who do. The more power those leaders have, the better able they are to deliver to the people what they want. By dismissing political leaders as little more than members of a self-interest cartel—economists of both the neoclassical and happiness persuasions find as many cartels in politics as they fail to find in business—Frey's preference for direct democracy and federalism would weaken democracy rather than strengthen it.

On normative as well as empirical grounds, then, the kind of economics that Frey rejects seems preferable to the kind that he espouses. Toward the end of his book, Frey proposes what he calls "positive Constitutional economics." Rules would be created to prohibit politicians from exploiting citizens. (Frey does not say who would make those rules.) Judges would be charged with enforcing the rules. Citizens could veto legislation and legislators could veto citizen initiatives. Federalism would be strengthened by decentralizing power, not to the states but to an entirely new political element that would have limited and defined functions, allow citizens to opt in or opt out, and organize people on the basis of commonly chosen interests as opposed to "archaic nationalism committed to pieces of land." Frey calls his preferred form of federalism "FOCJ," for units that are functional, overlapping, competing, and jurisdictional. We already have some sense of how they work; the process by which states outbid each other to attract business comes fairly close to his model. And we know what such a system produces: a race to the bottom, leaving everyone—except a few CEOs and stockholders—unhappy.

None of Frey's empirical findings are revolutionary, but his normative conclusions certainly are. Modestly, Frey calls them "to some extent radical, but not outlandish." In fact, they are radical and outlandish. At least the old Chicago School economics advocated a minimal state. Frey advocates no state at all, at least not in the sense in which nation-states have been the primary focus for political action in the modern world.

IV.

Dan Ariely's *Predictably Irrational* is the latest book by a behavioral economist to hit the jackpot. The reason for its popularity is not hard to discover. The experiments that it describes are as titillating as they are ingenious. Here is one of them. People were asked some rather suggestive questions, such as whether they would find it exciting to spank their sexual partners or to be tied up by them during the sexual act. After their answers were duly recorded, they were asked if they would be willing to respond to the same questions, only this time at the height of sexual arousal produced by masturbation. It turns out that when we are aroused we are completely different than when we are not aroused: we are more hospitable to risk, more irresponsible, more emotional. Ariely therefore concludes that people who have no idea what they will think or do when aroused cannot know themselves very well, and the implications are dramatic: "Our models of human behavior need to be rethought. Perhaps there is no such thing as a fully integrated human being. We may, in fact, be an agglomeration of multiple selves."

Before one concludes that behavioral economists are obsessed with sex, it should be pointed out that the masturbation experiment is the only one discussed by Ariely that requires this particular kind of self-help. The others are designed to show just how odd our behavior can be in the circumstances of everyday life. Ariely and his colleagues set up a stand and offer Lindt truffles for 15 cents and Hershey's Kisses for a penny: 73 percent of their customers choose the former, 27 percent the latter. Then they lower the price of the truffle to 14 cents and offer the Hershey Kiss for free, and now 69 percent choose the Kiss and only 31 percent the truffle. Calculating utility cannot explain this result. In both cases, the cost difference is identical. So it seems that we attach an almost mystical meaning to the idea of getting something for nothing. Zero is not just another number. It plays tricks with our rational minds.

Each chapter in Ariely's book explores a similar conundrum. We attach a higher value to the things we own and are trying to sell than to the things other people own and are trying to sell to us. We try to keep as many options open as possible, even though we are actually better off with fewer. We procrastinate, even when it makes us worse off to do so. We consider it perfectly normal to pay for a meal in a restaurant, but rude and impolite to pay for a meal prepared by a mother-in-law. Our seemingly independent decisions are inevitably influenced by the decisions made by others. Instead of wanting a product and then ascertaining how much it costs, we let the cost of a product determine whether we want it. In sum, Shakespeare was way off the mark when he wrote, "What a piece of work is a man." If anything, Ariely concludes from all the experiments he lays out in loving detail, "we are not noble in reason, not infinite in faculty, and rather weak in apprehension."

If Shakespeare was wrong, it should not surprise us that economists, at least those not blessed with the insights of this radical new approach, are wrong as well. Like Frey, Ariely concludes that his discipline needs a revolution. "We are all far less rational in our decision making than standard economic theory assumes," he asserts. "Our irrational behaviors are neither random nor senseless—they are systematic and predictable. We all make the same types of mistakes over and over, because of the basic wiring of our brains." Those are bold words. If they are true, then not only is economics in trouble, but just about everything we believe about the way our societies ought to be organized is wrong. We should not have an economic system that encourages rampant self-interest. Public policy should not be designed around strictly economic incentives. Subsidies for business, the provision of pensions to the elderly, and (of immediate relevance to the masturbation experiment) the way we control the consequences of teenage sexuality—all this will have to be rethought to take account of how we actually behave, as opposed to how economists have long told us we should behave. All these, I hasten to add, are conclusions that, normatively speaking, I like: better to have health care provided to all with government help than to rely on the self-interest of doctors, hospitals, and pharmaceutical companies. The problem is that the evidence Ariely offers in their support does not support them.

Before we start pulping all the economics textbooks, let alone rethinking a century's worth of public policy, we ought to pay a bit more attention to the actual details of Ariely's experiments. Consider the masturbators. This experiment involved a fairly narrow segment of the American population: all the subjects were male, young, and students. Why them and not, say, fiftysomething housewives? Ariely justifies his decision

ANTHONY RUSSO

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to focus solely on men because "in terms of sex, their wiring is a lot simpler than that of women." He does not tell us why he chose students, but we can guess: students are plentifully available, and securing their participation is cheap. Daniel Kahneman hoped that economic psychology could figure out what it needed to study and then develop the appropriate technologies; but in reality, as both of these books demonstrate, it works the other way. Technique comes first in the new economics, just as it did in the old, and conclusions follow. Ariely may want us to believe that his findings are startling; his methods, however, could not be more conventional. Survey researchers have been asking the same kinds of questions for ages, and psychologists have been studying students since experimental psychology was first developed as an academic discipline.

No one should underestimate the difficulty of persuading people to participate in psychological experiments. Availability is an important consideration in such research, which is one reason why psychologists continue to probe the behaviors of students, even though it has long been recognized that relying on them introduces bias into the results. At best, what we learn about some students might tell us things about all students, although it is still rather hard to imagine students at a conservative Christian college agreeing to answer questions while masturbating. At worst, and the worst is all too common, male students at MIT or Berkeley tell us only about male students at MIT or Berkeley, and perhaps not all that much about foreign students, older students, or female students.

Ariely is obligated to remind his readers, most of whom are neither psychologists nor economists, of the problems of selection bias that follow from his overreliance on students as subjects. But he fails to do so. In fact, he does the opposite: he generalizes from MIT classrooms to humankind as a whole, and with abandon. This might be called the technique of the Big Slip, gliding imperceptibly from a controlled and artificial experiment to breathtaking generalizations about matters that have puzzled philosophers and theologians through the ages. It makes for entertaining reading. Alas, it tells us little about the kind of creatures we are. One simply cannot go from oversexed young men to conclusions about how our brains are wired, especially when, as Ariely himself has pointed out, women are wired differently from men. Not everyone is divided internally between placid normality and wild passion. Some people are asexual. Others opt for chastity. Still others are sexually omnivorous. What a work is man, and woman, indeed.

Besides selection bias, there exists another reason to question experiments that use students as subjects. The problem is not just that students are young, disproportionately affluent, often inebriated—Ariely conducted some of his experiments in bars—and (if they are psych majors) self-selected. The problem is also that they are in college or graduate school and not yet out in the world. Experience with the world teaches us many things. One of them might be how to better control our emotions during sexual arousal. Another lesson is that there is no such thing as a free Hershey's Kiss. (Although Ariely used MIT students for one of his experiments about free candy—indeed, he even used nine-year-old trick-or-treaters—he also used shoppers in a mall.) A third lesson is that doors in life close as you get older. And a fourth is that there are some things you simply cannot postpone. This is usually called learning, which may confidently be defined as absorbing experiences so that the decisions you make are neither predictable nor irrational.

Generally, though not always, we learn with age. There is a term for that as well, and it is maturation. By basing so many of his findings on students, Ariely concentrates on people who have learned little and matured less. No wonder they are irrational—and predictably so. They are precisely at that stage of life when they tend not to think about other people, the future, or even the mess in their rooms. They are not only different from other people; they are different from the kinds of people they will become when they accumulate more experience of life. It makes a certain amount of sense to do experiments with them. It would make more sense to repeat the same experiments not when they are aroused, but when they are older. If rats can learn, surely MIT students can as well.

And if all this were not enough, Ariely's descriptions of his experiments with students contain yet another flaw: none of his experiments fail. Whether or not our irrationalities are predictable, Ariely's chapters are—and relentlessly so. Each chapter begins with a description of the way we are supposed to make decisions, and proposes some clever ways of testing the proposition, and—lo and behold—discovers through an experiment that this is not how we make them at all. Now, if I went shopping for a car and was told by the dealer that the used car he is selling happens to be perfect—that many tests were conducted on it and it passed every one with flying colors—I would be inclined to distrust the information that he was providing. All cars have flaws, if you look long enough. I confess to feeling much the same way about what Ariely is trying to sell me. I have been a social scientist long enough to know that not every hypothesis is always confirmed: neither life nor social science works that way. Either Ariely is the greatest designer of psychological experiments who ever lived, or he is failing to include in his thesis-driven book experiments that show that people can behave rationally after all.

It sounds harsh to say, especially about a social scientist who so clearly loves what he does, but in the absence of any accounts of failed experiments, it is difficult to take what Ariely tells us at face value. Which would you rather have, he asks at one point, a free $10 gift certificate or a $20 gift certificate for which you must pay $7? When I read that, the rational answer was immediately obvious. But Ariely claims that "most" people at a Boston mall irrationally chose the one that saved them $10 rather than the one that saved them $13. So curious minds want

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to know: how many is "most"? What differentiated those who chose the one option from those who chose the other? Were people given five seconds to answer, or a minute? Even if a statistically significant number of people chose the wrong answer, does this mean that they are irrational or just mathematically challenged? Falsifiability, one of the cardinal inclinations of scientific inquiry, just does not seem to happen in Ariely's research. He calls himself a scientist, but the methods that he describes lack any appreciation of the many false starts, delayed gratifications, and unexpected findings that are invariably part and parcel of the scientific enterprise.

No wonder, then, that when we move from the flaws inherent in the experiments that Ariely conducts to the sweeping statements of the human condition that he draws from them, we are still on the shakiest of grounds. Ariely describes what he calls the "main lesson" from his experiments this way: "We are pawns in a game whose forces we largely fail to comprehend." In which case it is not just economics that needs a revolution, but philosophy as well. Kant's insistence on autonomy, the importance that Mill attached to individual self-development, even the religiously inspired ideal that we can model ourselves on the image of God—all these notions represent an impossible dream. Since students in experiments cannot figure out what makes the most sense for them economically, we must reject the Enlightenment.

It is not Adam Smith's conception of the free market that Ariely seems willing to throw out; it is his entire moral philosophy. The interests can no longer control the passions. There are no impartial spectators. The market will not set us free, because our fate is in the hands of forces beyond our control. Perhaps you can begin to see why, in comparison to this, there might be something to be said for Smith-influenced neoclassical economics after all. However limited their imaginations, rational choosers are not pawns.

Ariely eventually wakes up to where his analysis is leading him—and decides that he does not wish to go there. "Once we understand when and where we may make erroneous decisions," he writes on the last page of his book, "we can try to be more vigilant, force ourselves to think differently about our decisions, or use technology to overcome our inherent shortcomings." This is encouraging, even optimistic—but it stands in rather sharp opposition to all the conclusions that Ariely draws from his experiments. He is strikingly similar to his masturbating students, only in reverse: the Dan Ariely who gets all excited about describing the details of his research does not seem to know the Dan Ariely who finally gets around to pondering their implications in relative calm. An agglomeration of multiple selves, indeed.

Of all the Victorians, it is not Edgeworth or Mill who should have the last word on Ariely. That honor falls to the mathematician Charles Dodgson, better known as Lewis Carroll. "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, "it means just what I choose it to mean, nothing more, nothing less." The same is true of Ariely. Our shortcomings are "inherent," but we can nonetheless overcome them. Our irrationalities are "predictable," but they are also correctable. Our brains are "wired," but we still have free will. We are "pawns" in a game of chess, but we can also act, if not like queens, then at least like bishops. By the time I finished *Predictably Irrational* I had pretty much the same view of human beings as when I began: imperfect creatures, but also quite capable of improving on their condition by learning from their mistakes. Some revolution.

IV.

The approaches of Bruno Frey and Dan Ariely goad us in slightly different directions. Ariely cares not a whit whether munching Lindt truffles or Hershey's Kisses actually improves our happiness, while one can easily imagine Frey correlating their respective consumption rates with measures of life satisfaction in every Swiss canton. (Lindt was founded in Frey's Zurich.) Still, the parallels between them are striking, and it is not just their common indebtedness to Daniel Kahneman and, by extension, to Amos Tversky. Both authors begin with a radically simple premise: in one case, that happiness is our greatest priority; in the other, that we always act irrationally. Both spend whole books demonstrating that, as a consequence of their blinding insight, the discipline of economics needs to be overhauled. And both conclude that the world is not so simple: we seek goals other than happiness; and for all our irrational predictability, we can be both rational and unpredictable. Each author announces a revolution and then, before closing, offers an epitaph for its passing.

One has to wonder why the revolution in economics failed so badly even before it really got off the ground. Neoclassical economics may in some ways be preferable to what the revolutionaries offer, but it remains a vulnerable approach, stuck in unrealistic assumptions about human behavior and all too complacent about the beneficial equilibria established by markets. Nor can one deny the ingeniousness of the early days of economic psychology, especially the inventive puzzles that Kahneman and Tversky devised. If ever a field were ripe for revolution, it is economics. Yet if these two books are any indication, supply and demand, marginal utility, rational choice, and cost-benefit analysis are not going away. At best, economists will tweak their models a bit to account for some of our odder calculations. More likely, they will simply reiterate their belief that we need not examine the internal mechanisms of utility satisfaction because the price someone is willing to pay for something is really all we need to know.

Since they fail so conspicuously to live up to what they promise, these books reveal more about the sociology of the academy than they do about the behavior of ordinary people. The rules of academic life seem to require two inclinations—and they work at cross-purposes. One is that each generation must set out to topple the findings and the methods of the previous one, which means that we always seem to have a "new social history" or a "linguistic turn" or a "cognitive revolution." (Even neoclassical economics, which is presumably about to give way to hedonics, was the enfant terrible of the discipline not that long ago, intent on toppling Keynesianism.) It is all-important to be at the cutting edge. You have to a write a dissertation showing that someone else was

Bibliotaph

Bury me with my books.
Slip one under my head:
a satin pillow's much too soft
for such a rigid bed.

Bury me with my books.
Open some on my chest,
their pages shadowing the heart
beginning its long rest.

Bury me with my books,
tossed in until the hole
is filled with words instead of dirt
and I am like a mole

happy to stay hidden,
not needing light to see
that paper heaven made by hands,
the books that buried me.

MICHAEL MCFEE

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wrong. The bigger the apple cart you overturn, the better your chances for success. Like Newton, academics stand on the shoulders of giants—but they stand upon them to bury them.

At the same time, the academic world, for all its leftism in politics, is a strikingly conservative world in temperament. Innovation and individual initiative are distrusted. Tenure rewards those whose accomplishments are dated and punishes those who are too daring. You must show deference to your elders, or, as they are called in the academic world, your mentors. It is not good to call too much attention to yourself in what you write. The rules of advancement are strict, and everyone understands them: if you fail to follow them, the fault is your own. If you want to think for yourself, try the business world.

In line with the side of academic life that insists upon the new, those committed to economic psychology quickly moved beyond thought experiments to grand proclamations. Thaler's *Quasi Rational Economics* was cautious about touting the insights offered by the new approach, but much that came afterward would dispense with wishy-washy qualifiers such as "quasi." ("Our aim in editing this book," reads the preface to *Well-Being*, "was not at all modest: we hoped to announce the existence of a new field of psychology.") Academics tire of approaches the way consumers tire of goods; there are conferences to be organized, special issues of journals to be published, departments to be rebuilt, best-sellers to be written. Why proclaim a revision when you can announce a revolution?

At one and the same time, however, the self-proclaimed revolutionaries, for all the enthusiasm with which they announce their discoveries, hew carefully to the old ways of doing things. Bruno Frey's book conforms to all the conventions of academic discourse. True, English is not Frey's first language, yet his relentless use of the passive voice and reliance on deadly prose have more to do with the way economics is written than with the way German is written. Like economists of any persuasion, Frey wants to be protective of his own discipline's turf even as he ventures onto the turf of others. He, like others in his discipline, can only correlate; he cannot establish causality. Neoclassical economists may not like what Frey has to say, but they will recognize the way he says it. Reading Frey, we are worlds away from the era in which economists were learned outside their field and wrote books that would become classics of human understanding.

Dan Ariely's contribution is also, in its own way, quite conventional. It is true that he challenges the near-religious conviction with which economists cling to the idea of rationality. But Ariely's subjects are consumers all the same, constantly on the lookout for bargains, even if they are not always shrewd enough to obtain them. (For both these economists, shopping—or, more generally, spending—is the archetypal human activity.) Behavioral economists, Ariely included, are fascinated by gambling, an arena in which people constantly misread the odds against them. But the people they study are not Pascalian bettors wondering about divine grace, nor are they statesmen pondering the risks of going to war. The errors of judgment they make are small ones. Little is at stake in the questions they are asked about chocolate candies, and even less because the circumstances in which they are asked those questions are so artificial. When it comes to human understanding, the ambitions of the revolution are paltry. What began as a movement marked by a curious, if not actually humanistic, sensibility has transformed itself into a one-dimensional vision of human nature in which the perfect rationality of neoclassical economics is replaced by an equally simple-minded conception of human beings as either happiness maximizers or perfect fools.

Ariely's contribution could not be more different from the work of most neoclassical economists: he is willing to write for a popular audience and thus to face the special scorn that academics reserve for those who sell many books. (Even here, though, Milton Friedman was the pioneer.) Ariely adheres to the conventions of successful nonfiction writing as fiercely as Frey does to the conventions of university-press publication. *Predictably Irrational* is filled with lots of advice to ordinary people dressed up with the authority of science; with descriptions of experiments meant to make the author seem risqué; with confessional asides giving readers insights into the person whose words they are reading. (Ariely, although born in New York, grew up in Israel, and he writes movingly about his recovery from serious burn injuries suffered at the age of eighteen when a flare exploded in his presence. I leave it to others more familiar with Israel to ponder what it is about the Israeli experience that prods one to looks beyond classical rationality.)

In his autobiographical comments written on the occasion of winning the Nobel Prize, Kahneman wrote about Tversky this way: "Amos was often described by people who knew him as the smartest person they knew. He was also very funny, with an endless supply of jokes appropriate to every nuance of a situation. In his presence, I became funny as well, and the result was that we could spend hours of solid work in continuous mirth." Like them, and at times like Steven Levitt, Ariely aims to tickle the funny bones of his readers. There is a smart-alecky quality to behavioral economics.

Reading the insistence of Ariely and others who maintain that everyone who studied human beings before behavioral economics came along was wrong, I conclude that we should once and for all stop calling for revolutions in our understanding of ourselves, and end this remarkable presumption. In the long history of humankind, the social sciences were developed only recently, but we have been trying to figure ourselves out since we first began to think. It defies the imagination that one new methodology or theoretical assumption is going to topple all previous efforts to understand the human condition. Sometimes revolutions in our understanding of the world do happen—they tell me that Albert Einstein led one (and that, having done so, he spent the rest of his life running down the wrong paths)—but they are rare in the physical sciences, and they are next to nonexistent in the social sciences. Human beings are indeed charming and perverse and altogether fascinating creatures, and the study of ourselves is among the richest of intellectual endeavors. We ought to give ourselves a bit more credit than the revolutionists of the social sciences extend to us: we pursue many goals at the same time, and we do so in all kinds of predictable and unpredictable ways.

And yet it is possible to understand us—slowly, patiently, in fits and starts, and with due respect for those who have been studying us for so long. That is why the history of social theory is still of philosophical interest, whereas the history of natural science is of almost no scientific interest: we still repair urgently to Weber and Durkheim, but we may safely forget about phlogiston. In both the social scientific and humanistic studies of human existence, it is not a revolution that we need. What we need are observations and suggestions and ideas, collected one at a time, by different people, from different disciplines, with different methodologies. That is not sexy, but neither is it easy. ◆

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Cambridge Diarist

Peace Offensive

In Middle Eastern wars, the United Nations is almost always hectoring Israel for being reluctant to seek peace. So it was a stunner when Terje Rød-Larsen—U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's "special coordinator" in the occupied territories, Kofi Annan's "personal representative" to Yasir Arafat, Ban Ki-moon's "special representative" for overseeing the cease-fire agreement ending the second Lebanon war, and in his next posting "envoy to the personal representative of the special coordinator for planetary salvation"—lambasted Israel for its recent negotiations with Syria: "Israel has given Syria a huge gift, without thus far receiving anything in return."

Israel, it seems, is in a chatty mood these days. It is cutting deals with Hamas and prepared to talk with Lebanon (an imaginary country, really) over the fate of Shebaa Farms—a worthless tract the size of a table cloth. Wiseacres say that Israel's foray into parleying with its enemies is to save Ehud Olmert's prime ministerial hide, sandblasted for the umpteenth time by accusations of unethical personal conduct with other folks' cash. This may or may not be a plausible explanation. But the Israeli public would by far rather forfeit (Arab) parts of Jerusalem than give up the Golan Heights, from which for two decades Syrian artillery fire had targeted the *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* of the Galilee. And killed not insignificant numbers of Israelis.

It's not only Rød-Larsen who's unhappy that Jerusalem is negotiating with Damascus; Condoleezza Rice is plenty upset, too. And, of course, anyone with a brain grasps that there are only two concessions worth getting from Bashar Assad, and these are: a) detaching Syria from Iran and b) lifting Syria's hold over Beirut, which, alas, was just solidified by Hezbollah's quickie civil war in the capital and in the Shouf mountains and then ratified without real alternative by a summit of factional leaders convening in Qatar.

Proposition A is tied to Proposition B in that Hezbollah is an instrument of Iran and its Revolutionary Guards. Tehran's road to Beirut is through Damascus. And the co-dependence of these two propositions also highlights the fantastical nature of all this peace talk: Iran must respect Syria's historic ambitions for direct political dominion over Lebanon, and Syria must allow the Shia of Iran the religious sweep of their doctrine across the region. Oh, yes, I mustn't forget: Since 2006, Iran has been on both of Israel's northern frontiers and, in a meaningful sense, in Gaza, too. This is not a happy circumstance. If there is any development that will deflect the powers from squeezing the ayatollahs into giving up their nuclear aspirations it is the prospect of Israel living quietly with borders on which Iran sits.

Maybe the Israelis think they will disentangle Syria from Iran. They cannot. The alliance fulfills Assad's Lebanese dreams, and the Golan Heights means almost nothing to the tyrant. Not since the Yom Kippur War has Syria made a move against the Golan. All its bloody mischief was funneled through Lebanon, and Lebanon was the name of his and his father's desire. Of course, Assad would take the Heights if Israel were silly enough to give it. But it would get nothing in return.

I am afraid that the false peace initiatives have already registered a "success" in Gaza. Hamas has announced and Israel has acquiesced to a cease-fire. I oppose this cease-fire for the same reason I opposed the wildly heralded one in Lebanon two summers ago. Then, of course, it was Rice who drove the international stampede that the IDF leave the country and that the ensuing disarmament and pacification of Hezbollah be assigned to UNIFIL, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, which has been both interim and a flop since 1978. The dreary results of that assignment can be judged by indisputable facts.

Under the terms of the new truce in the south, Israel will reopen the supply lines to and from Gaza: fuel, food, trade. (Medicines had always been getting through.) Hamas promises not to hurl rocketry and missiles into Israel and, of course, Israel will not retaliate if there is nothing to provoke retaliation. But an armistice lasts only until it is broken. Just wait. In the meantime, Egypt and Hamas have committed themselves to prevent and interdict smuggling of weapons and weapons-grade materiel from the Sinai to Gaza. This is a vocation that Cairo has never truly taken to, and the terrorist militias have always found ways to run contraband arms through tunnels in the sand. They are not likely to stop. Anybody want to bet?

As you already know, I'm no fan of Mohammed Abbas or his Fatah henchmen. But they have been designated as the Palestinian moderates. So, like Secretary Rice and in the awful circumstances that obtain, I suppose these are my favored Palestinians. They were also supposed to be Olmert's and Ehud Barak's. Therefore, it is often said that this new deal with Hamas cuts the legs from right under Abbas and *chaverim*. Well, I'm sorry, those legs were not at all sturdy. And, in the end, with American prodding, Abbas will negotiate the state that Hamas will inherit. That's the grim conclusion I have reached.

It used to be that Israel would move the heavens to rescue its kidnapped soldiers. This is one reason for the daring of so many of its fighting men. In recent years there has been an increase in kidnapping as a battle tactic by both the Palestinians and Hezbollah. Frankly, the Arabs play cruel games with these people (and their relatives), not saying whether they are dead or alive, even those who were captured decades ago. Are Eldad Regev and Udi Goldwasser still in this world? Nasrallah will not say. Gilad Shalit, it is believed, is still alive. Why was he not released in exchange for the last return of Palestinian prisoners? Liat Collins had a story, "Between life and the dead," in the *Jerusalem Post* some weeks ago detailing this manipulation of sorrow and fear. Dog tags and body parts are transmitted but not accurate information or men who are still breathing. Make peace with these people? This might be the only instance you hear me utter this: I wholeheartedly agree with the U.N. hack.

Martin Peretz

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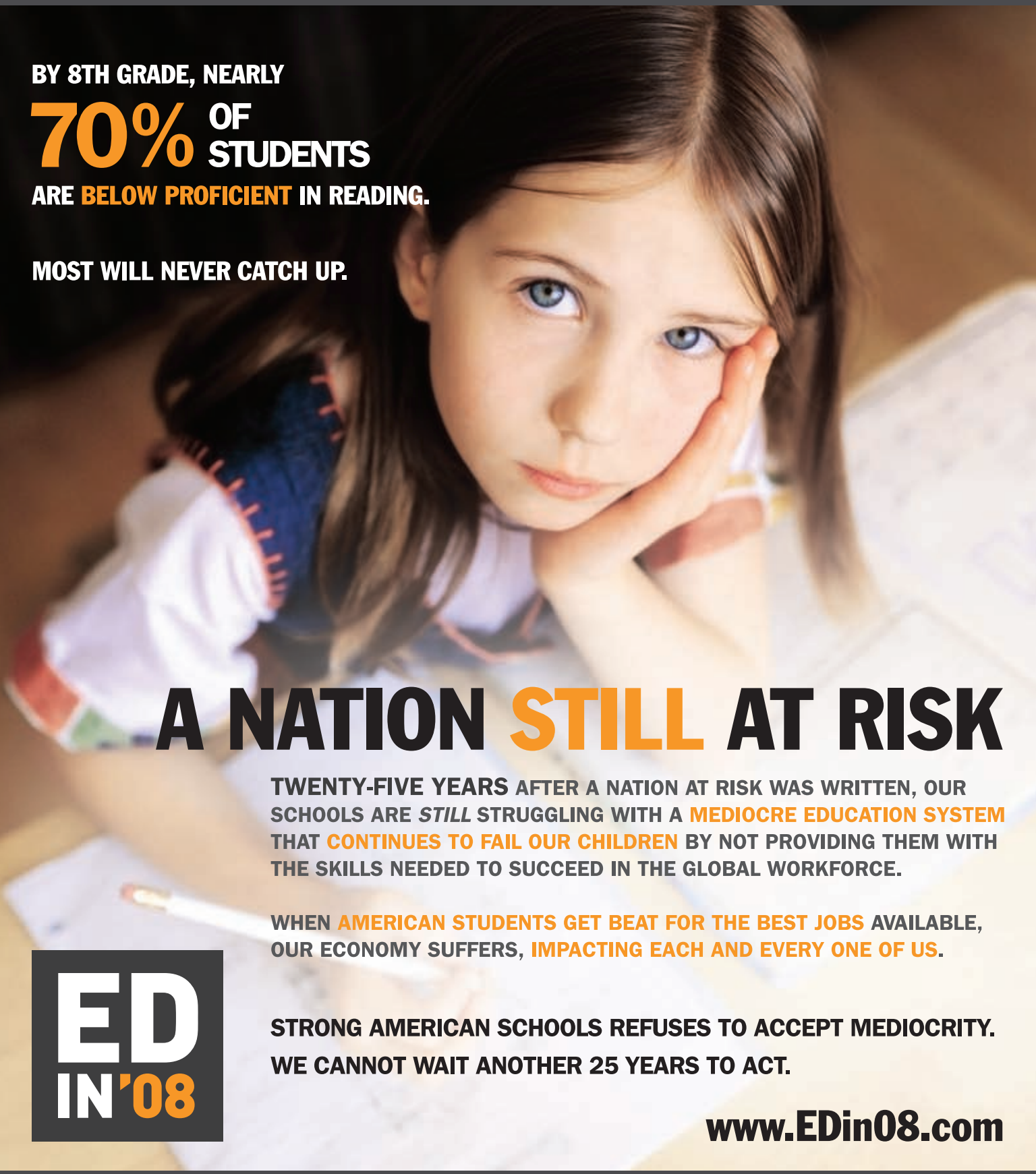

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